NATION

India-B'desh to hash out fencing, infiltration issues

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Mkts log gain for 2nd day; Sensex climbs over 200 pts

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

India Open: Anupama, Tanisha-Ashwini enter second round

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 16 JANUARY 2025 | THURSDAY | BENGALURU | 15 RAJAB, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 16 | Pages: 8

111 farmers fast-unto-death in solidarity with Dallewal

CHANDIGARH, 15 JAN

In a dramatic escalation of their protest, a group of 111 farmers commenced a fast-unto-death on Wednesday in solidarity with their leader, Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been enduring a hunger strike since 26 November last year at the Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana. The new contingent, dressed in black, positioned themselves on the Haryana side of the border, with arrangements for tents and blankets being made as temperatures drop in the region.

The Haryana Police have tightened security and enforced Section 163 of the Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, prohibiting gatherings of five or more individuals. Farmer leaders expressed grave concerns for Dallewal's health, stating that the 70-year-old is at risk of "multiple organ failure" due to his prolonged fasting.

Surjit Singh Hardojhande, who leads the group of fast participants, condemned the central government's failure to address their demands, asserting, "If our family head (Dallewal) is going to die, then we thought we should also lay down our lives." Their fast continues until the government responds to their calls for negotiations and acceptance of demands, which include a legal guarantee for minimum support prices (MSP) for crops.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Amit Bhatia acknowledged the farmers' peaceful intentions but reiterated the importance of maintaining law and order. He stated, "We are making every effort to manage the situation peacefully."

Concerns about Dallewal's health have increased, with doctor assessments indicating he has been unable to retain even water, leading to a critical condition. The Supreme Court has tasked Punjab government officials and medical professionals with deciding whether Dallewal should be hospitalised, as his fast marks the 51st day—one of the longest in Independent India's history. Farmers have warned that any adverse developments concerning Dallewal could provoke serious unrest. —*PTI*

Farmers wear black clothes during their protest at the Khanauri border on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

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ED gets MHA nod to prosecute Kejriwal

The action in excise policy comes ahead of polls

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The Union Home Ministry has given its sanction to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to prosecute former Delhi chief minister and AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal in an excise policy-linked money laundering case, officials said on Wednesday.

The federal agency filed a chargesheet against the 56-year-old politician before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in the national capital last year after arresting him in March.

Kejriwal, who is currently out on bail in this case, is contesting the Delhi Assembly polls from the New Delhi seat.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has recently granted the required sanction to the ED for prosecuting Kejriwal under the anti-money laundering law in the Delhi excise policy case, officials said.

The ministry is the competent authority to okay such a request by the agency through the Delhi Lieutenant Governor, they said.

The officials said similar sanctions have also been obtained for other accused public servants, including former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, in this case.

Arvind Kejriwal is currently out on bail in this case **PHOTO: PTI**

The development comes ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls slated to be held on 5 February.

This came after the Supreme Court's November 2024 ruling that such a procedure has to be undertaken by the ED, similar to the procedure followed by the CBI. Kejriwal has been made an accused in his personal capacity as well as in the capacity of being the national convenor of the AAP. —*PTI*

HC asks Lokayukta to probe MUDA scam

HC adjourns hearing CBI's petition till 27 Jan

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

The Karnataka High Court, on Wednesday allowed the Lokayukta to continue its investigation into the alleged Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) site allocation irregularities involving Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

The court directed that the probe be overseen by the Inspector General of Police, Lokayukta, and instructed the anti-corruption agency to file detailed records of its investigation so far.

This directive was issued while hearing a plea seeking a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the case.

Petitioner Snehamayi Krishna, an activist, questioned the impartiality of the Lokayukta investigation, given the involvement of high-ranking officials and politicians.

Justice M Nagaprasanna emphasised the need for transparency. "Lokayukta must place on record all details of the investigation to date. The inquiry will be monitored by the IG of Police, Lokayukta. Any reports should be submitted a day before the next hearing," the court said, listing the next session for 27 January.

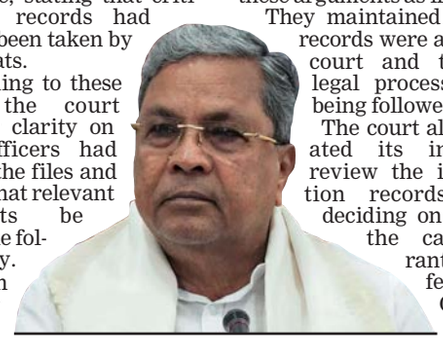
Senior Advocate Maninder Singh, representing the petitioner, argued for an independent probe to maintain public confidence, stating that critical case records had allegedly been taken by bureaucrats.

Responding to these claims, the court asked for clarity on which officers had accessed the files and directed that relevant documents be filed by the following day.

Singh further noted that CM Siddaramaiah's wife, a party in the case, had offered to surrender the contested land sites. He expressed concerns about preferential treatment, saying, "If any ordinary citizen seeks land, the process is stringent. However, this surrender was processed rapidly."

Senior Advocates Ravivarma Kumar and Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing Siddaramaiah, dismissed these arguments as irrelevant. They maintained that the records were already in court and that due legal processes were being followed.

The court also reiterated its intent to review the investigation records before deciding on whether the case warrants a transfer to the CBI. —*PTI*



Caste census report likely to be tabled next week, says CM

NEW DELHI/BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced on Wednesday that the presentation of the caste census report before the state cabinet has been postponed by a week. The Karnataka Socio-Economic and Education Survey, commonly known as the 'Karnataka caste census', was originally scheduled for 16 January. Siddaramaiah confirmed the delay, stating, "There was a plan to table the caste census report in tomorrow's cabinet meeting. However, it will not be taken up tomorrow. It will be placed a week later in a subsequent cabinet meeting." He added that the report would be made public after the cabinet's decision. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Pannun case: India seeks action against ex-spy

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

A government-appointed high-powered enquiry committee has suggested legal action against an unnamed individual following its investigation into organised criminal and terrorist activities that jeopardised the security of both India and the US. This probe was initiated after allegations surfaced regarding a failed assassination attempt on Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun by Indian agents in New York in 2023. The individual of interest, Vikash Yadav, a former officer of India's external intelligence agency, RAW, was mentioned by US authorities in connection with the incident. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

In a boost, Navy gets 2 warships & 1 submarine

MUMBAI, 15 JAN

Indian Navy warships INS Surat, INS Nilgiri and INS Vaghsheer were commissioned at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday.

Emphasising that India is emerging as a major maritime power and is being recognised as a reliable and responsible partner globally, the PM pitched for an open, secure, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

The Navy described the commissioning of the three major combatants as a historic occasion.

INS Nilgiri, the lead ship of the Project 17A stealth frigate class, represents a significant advancement over the Shivalik-class frigates.

Designed by the Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau and built at the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited, it incorporates advanced features for enhanced survivability, seakeeping and stealth.

INS Surat, the fourth and final vessel of the Project 15B stealth destroyer class, is a follow-on to the Kolkata-class destroyers. It incorporates improvements in design and capability, making it a critical addition to the Navy's surface fleet.

INS Vaghsheer is the sixth and final submarine under the Scorpene-class Project 75. It is a diesel-electric submarine designed for roles including anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare and intelligence gathering. —*PTI*

An Indian Navy personnel aboard INS Surat ahead of its commissioning ceremony, in Mumbai **PHOTO: PTI**

Meta apologises over Zuck's remark on polls

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Meta India has issued an apology following CEO Mark Zuckerberg's comments suggesting that the incumbent Indian government lost power in the 2024 elections due to its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. Labelled an "inadvertent error," the apology comes after Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw condemned Zuckerberg's statements as "misinformation" and called for the company to uphold factual integrity.

On a Joe Rogan podcast, Zuckerberg noted that several incumbent governments, including India's, had faced electoral defeat post-Covid. However, Minister Vaishnaw refuted this claim, asserting that India experienced a democratic affirmation of trust in Prime Minister Modi's government, which continued to lead effectively with over 640 million voters participating in the elections. Meta India's Vice President, Shivnath Thukral, responded on social media, stating, "Mark's observation that many incumbent parties were not re-elected in 2024 elections holds true for several countries, BUT not India." He expressed regret for the misconception and reaffirmed India's importance to Meta.

The controversy escalated, prompting Bharatiya Janata Party MP Nishikant Dubey, head of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and IT, to announce intentions to summon Meta for clarity on Zuckerberg's remarks. Following the apology, Dubey declared the issue resolved, describing it as a triumph for Indian citizens. After the apology by Meta India, Dubey said he treated the matter as "closed".

"A Meta India official has finally apologised for the mistake. This is a victory of the common citizens of India," Dubey said in a post on X.—*PTI*

ODI: India scores historic 435 with Mandhana's ton

RAJKOT, 15 JAN

The Indian women's cricket team, led by captain Smriti Mandhana's explosive century, achieved a historic 304-run victory over Ireland, marking their largest-ever win in One Day Internationals (ODIs). India's innings saw them set a formidable target of 436 runs, ultimately dismissing Ireland for just 131 runs in 31.4 overs.

Mandhana shone brightly, scoring a rapid 135 runs from 80 balls, while her opening partner Pratika Rawal impressively contributed 154 runs off 129 balls. Together, the duo forged a staggering partnership of 233 runs for the first wicket—the highest for India in Women's ODIs—and pushed the team to 435/5, the highest total ever by an Indian side in ODIs. Ireland's innings struggled to recover after a shaky start, despite a 64-run stand between Orla Prendergast (36) and Sarah Forbes (41). However, once Prendergast fell, the wickets tumbled rapidly as India's spinners with 3/27, dismantled Ireland. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 8

WITH SPACEX ROCKET

City firm launches India's 1st pvt satellite constellation

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Bengaluru-based startup Pixxel successfully launched three of the world's highest-resolution commercial hyperspectral satellites, Firefly, from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California on 15 January. The satellites were launched aboard SpaceX's Transporter-12 rideshare mission at 1 am, with Pixxel hosting a live screening of the event at its Bengaluru headquarters.

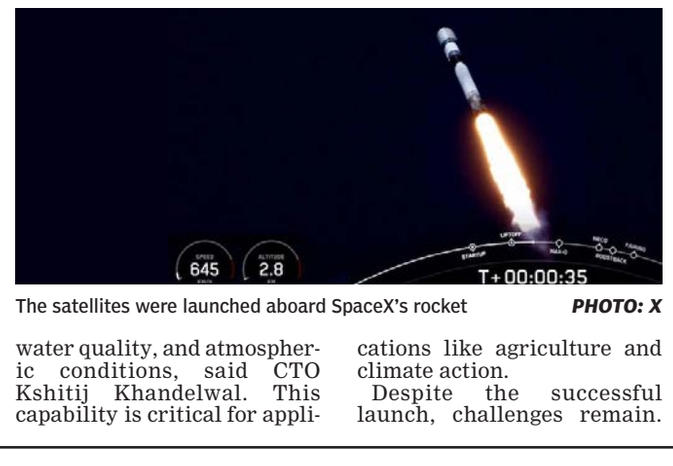
With this launch, Pixxel aims to deliver more precise climate and Earth insights, said founder and CEO Awais Ahmed. The Firefly constellation is six times sharper than the typical 30-metre resolution of most hyperspectral satellites, capturing fine details previously invisible to conventional systems. This also marks India's first commercial satellite constellation, offering a five-metre resolution.

The satellites' advanced resolution, combined with their ability to capture data across over 150 spectral bands, enables the detection of subtle changes in chemical compositions, vegetation health, water quality, and atmospheric conditions, said CTO Kshitij Khandelwal. This capability is critical for applications like agriculture and climate action.

Despite the successful launch, challenges remain. Ahmed noted that due to the uniqueness of their data, the Indian government requires multiple bidders before they can procure from Pixxel. Khandelwal added that while the satellite's commissioning will take a week, full operation, including image capture, will take about a month.

Pixxel plans to launch three more Firefly satellites in March.

The company began its journey in April 2022 with the launch of Shakuntala, India's first private hyperspectral Earth-imaging satellite. —*PTI*



The satellites were launched aboard SpaceX's rocket **PHOTO: X**

Mandya engineering student drowns in Cauvery River

MYSURU, 15 JAN

An engineering student drowned in river Cauvery at a picnic spot near Balamuri Ganesha temple in Srirangapatna taluk of Mandya district on Wednesday.

Police identified the deceased as S Shreyas, 19, of Nagenahalli village on the outskirts of Mysuru. He was a first year BE student in a private engineering college near Palahalli in Srirangapatna. The incident occurred when Shreyas and some of his classmates went for a picnic to the spot. While swimming in the river, Shreyas was caught in whirlpool and drowned. Shreyas's friends did not enter the water as they could not swim.

On being informed, KRS police fished out the student's body with the help of divers. They have registered a case and started an investigation. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Tata partners with IISc to establish medical school

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

The Tata Group has announced a partnership with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) to establish the Tata IISc Medical School on the IISc Bengaluru campus. In an MoU signed on 14 January, the Tata Group pledged Rs 500 crore to support the development of the medical school.

N Chandrasekaran, Chairman of Tata Sons, highlighted healthcare as both one of India's biggest challenges and greatest opportunities, noting how technology could transform diagnosis, care, and community health. He expressed hope that the institute would foster cutting-edge research and global collaboration, training a highly skilled cadre of physician-scientists. *—Salar News*

Jarkiholi slams Satish, exposes fund controversy

BELAGAVI, 15 JAN

BJP MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi, known for his rivalry with Deputy CM DK Shivakumar, spoke in support of his brother, Congress Minister Satish Jarkiholi. At a press conference, Ramesh criticized Satish's soft approach to politics, urging him to adopt a more aggressive stance. Ramesh also revealed he had personally contributed Rs 1.27 crore for the construction of the Congress Bhavan in Belagavi, disputing claims by Public Works Minister Satish that he paid Rs 3 crore. Ramesh clarified he paid Rs 27 lakh for land and Rs 1 crore for the building's construction. He accused Congress leaders, including Women and Child Welfare Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar, of corruption during the building's construction. Ramesh praised Satish for stating he had never allowed DK Shivakumar to influence Belagavi politics. *—Salar News*

Actor Darshan visits hospital, surgery on cards

MYSURU, 15 JAN

A day after celebrating Sankranti at his farmhouse on along T Narasipur Road, actor Darshan, who is out on bail in the Chitradurga Renukaswamy murder case, visited Manipal Hospital in the city on Wednesday for treatment of back pain and spinal issues.

Darshan was accompanied by his friend Dhanveergowda.

Dr Ajay Hegde, who has been treating Darshan, administered an injection and advised him rest for three days. He had appeared before the court five days ago along with all other accused in the murder case as part of the bail procedure. Their next appearance has been scheduled for 25 February. On 13 December, the high court granted conditional bail to Darshan. *—Salar News*

State defers caste census report tabling to next week

Earlier, Home Minister said the bill will be tabled on Thursday

NEW DELHI/BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced on Wednesday that the presentation of the caste census report before the state cabinet has been postponed by a week. The Karnataka Socio-Economic and Education Survey, commonly known as the 'Karnataka caste census', was originally scheduled for 16 January.

Siddaramaiah confirmed the delay, stating, "There was a plan to table the caste census report in tomorrow's cabinet meeting. However, it will not be taken up tomorrow. It will be placed a week later in a subsequent cabinet meeting." He added that the report would be made public after the cabinet's decision, noting that the ongoing public discussion is based on "assumptions" as the report has not been disclosed yet.

Earlier, Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara suggested the report would be presented on Thursday and stressed the need for transparency. "The sealed cover (of the report) will be opened before the cabinet to prevent any leakage of information. Whether there will be a discussion on it or not, I cannot speak about it now, but at least abstract information will be available once opened," he said.

The report, which cost approximately 169 crore, has sparked controversy, particularly among the dominant Lingayat and Vokkaliga communities, who have raised concerns about its methodology. Both communities have called the survey "unscientific" and demanded a new survey be conducted. The survey was commissioned by the previous Congress government in 2015, with H Kantharaju leading the committee. It was completed in 2016, but successive governments kept it under wraps. *—PTI*

CM Siddaramaiah added that the report would be made public after the cabinet's decision PHOTO: X

HCM dismisses allegations on caste census distraction

MYSURU, 15 JAN

Karnataka state Social Welfare Minister Dr HC Mahadevappa has rejected claims that the upcoming presentation of the caste census report is intended to distract the public from the ongoing issues surrounding the state's leadership changes. Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, he stated that he has not yet reviewed the agenda for the cabinet meeting scheduled for Thursday, where the highly anticipated caste census report will be presented.

Dr Mahadevappa highlighted that the Congress government, under Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, initiated the caste census between 2013 and 2018, leading to the compilation of a report led by H Kanatharaj to assess the socio-economic status of the people in Karnataka. He assured that the report does not target any specific community.

The minister expressed the party's commitment to presenting the findings of the caste census, citing the All India Congress Committee's call for a nationwide caste census as further support for their efforts. *—Salar News*

'Cong top brass silenced us on leadership change'

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on January 15 stated that AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala, representing the Congress high command, had instructed party leaders not to comment on any potential leadership change in the state. Parameshwara emphasized that discussions on such matters would be postponed until a later date. He also responded to Minister R B Timmapur's remarks about a Dalit becoming Chief Minister, acknowledging Timmapur's political experience and capabilities.

The Congress party is currently grappling with internal speculation over a possible leadership change following a power-sharing agreement between Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar after their 2023 electoral victory.

Amid these discussions, a meeting for SC/ST community leaders, initially scheduled for January 8, was postponed. Parameshwara confirmed that the state Congress would organize future meetings for the community.

Meanwhile, the possibility of a cabinet reshuffle remains unclear. *—Salar News*

FLOWER SHOW 2025

The 217th Republic Day Flower Show is all decked up to be inaugurated by Chief Minster Siddaramaiah at the Lalbagh Glass House in Bengaluru on Wednesday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Karnataka Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi PHOTO: X

Satish Jarkiholi sparks debate on Cong Prez change

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Karnataka Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi on Wednesday sparked a debate within the ruling Congress over the change of the state president, saying a full-time leader was needed to devote more time to the party in the state.

Currently, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar holds the post.

"It's not about whether this person or that person should become the party president. The person should give their full time to the party. That's the only demand, and nothing else," Jarkiholi told reporters here.

According to him, while there is a lot of discussion happening at the lower levels, it should also take place at the top level.

"It's not about someone's adamant posture. We want someone who works, that's it," the minister said.

Noting that the decision is up to the party's high command, whether to allow the incumbent to continue or bring in someone new, Jarkiholi emphasised that a discussion at the top level was needed.

The minister added, "The organisational work has decreased since all of us became ministers. We are busy with the work of our portfolios and our districts. We are not going anywhere, and we are not able to devote time to the party."

Jarkiholi also claimed that the party leadership had intended to change the state president after the Lok Sabha elections, but this has not happened.

According to him, a few people from the backward community are ready to take up the job. *—PTI*

Car crash: Minister Laxmi's driver changes statement

BELAGAVI, 15 JAN

The case related to minister Laxmi Hebbalkar's car accident on Monday near Ambadgatti near Kittur town took a sudden turn on Wednesday after her driver, who had initially said he lost control of the vehicle in an attempt to avoid hitting a stray dog, filed a hit-and-run case with Kittur police.

Belagavi Superintendent of Police (SP) Bheemashankar S Guled confirmed that Hebbalkar's driver Gangadharaiah has filed an FIR in connection with the accident on Tuesday.

Gangadharaiah said in the FIR that he was driving on Lane 2 on Pune–Bengaluru national highway when a large truck on Lane 1 scraped the right side of his car. As he moved his car to the left, the truck again hit the car, harder this time, because of which he lost control of the vehicle and it hit a tree after crossing the service road, Guled said.

Kittur police, however, have not withdrawn a case of rash and negligent driving they registered against Gangadharaiah on Monday, the SP said.

Guled said police are checking the CCTV cameras on highway and the toll plazas to trace the truck.

The high end car rammed into the tree at a high speed, the SP said. The minister, her brother and MLC Channaraj Hattiholi and gunman were in the car.

The injured are receiving treatment at Vijaya Ortho and Trauma Centre in Belagavi. *—Salar News*

Cops to probe cow attack case further if needed: HM

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said the police would thoroughly investigate the possibility of others being involved in the brutal act of slashing the udders of cows in Bengaluru.

The city police have arrested a 30-year-old man from Bihar for allegedly attacking and maiming three cows in Chamarajpet here, during the early hours of 12 January.

"One person has been arrested and he is said to be from another state. Action is being taken against him. In case that angle needs to be investigated, police will do it, as to whether anyone is behind him, whether he did it under anyone's instigation or whether he did it by himself, all this will come from investigation," Parameshwara told.

He was responding to a question on the BJP suspecting involvement of others.

Asked about BJP and some rightwing outfits claiming that the Congress and its policies are motivating such incidents, the Home Minister said, "if someone talks according to their whims and fancies, I can't react to such things. Who from the Congress has done it? I too can say BJP people cooperated for such an incident, will it be accepted? If they try to politicise everything, people are watching." *—PTI*

BJP farmers wing protests at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Wednesday, demanding a thorough investigation into the recent cow attack in Chamarajpet PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Zameer gifts 3 cows to man whose cattle was mutilated

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

In a gesture of compassion following the disturbing mutilation of three cows in Vinayaka Nagar, Chamarajpet, Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan has purchased and handed over three cows worth ₹3 lakh to the family of the victims. The recipient, Karna's mother Savari Ammal and his sister Amudha, expressed gratitude for the support during a ceremony attended by local leaders.

The incident, which has sparked outrage in the local community, saw Minister Khan step forward to assist the grieving family. "On behalf of my brother, I apologize. Zameer Anna has shown a generous heart by gifting these cows," said Amudha during the event, emphasizing the family's appreciation for the gesture.

The event was attended by several prominent figures, including Chief Minister's political secretary Naseer Ahmed, KMDC chairman Altaf Khan, and leaders added that while some individuals were attempting to politicise the issue, the family stood firmly with their local MLA. *—Salar News*

FANS PAY TRIBUTE

Veteran actor 'Sarigama' Viji passes away at 77

BENGALURU, 15 JAN

Kannada actor R Vijaykumar, known by his stage name Sarigama Viji, died on Wednesday at the age of 77.

He had been undergoing treatment for a lung infection at Manipal Hospital in Malleswaram, said his son Rohit to PTI.

"We thought it was the seasonal change of weather infection when he fell sick. But things escalated in the last seven days and he died at about 9.30 am today due to failure of multiple organs," he added. Viji debuted as an actor in the Kannada film 'Beluvalada Madilalli' in 1975.

He acted in 269 films in Kannada, and also worked as an assistant director in close to 80 films.

R Vijaykumar PHOTO: X

However, he is more known for his stage play 'Samsaradalli Sarigama', which he directed and acted in. His theatre group, Yashasvi, staged the play more than 1,390 times, not just in Bengaluru but also in Hyderabad, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai, said his son.

Viji's last rites will take place at Chamarajpet Crematorium at around noon tomorrow.

His body will be displayed at his residence in Mahalakshmipuram till 10 tonight so that his fans can pay their respect to him.

"Tomorrow, Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce will be organising a public viewing at Ravindra Kalakshetra from 10.30 am to 11.30 am after that he will be cremated." *—PTI*

Water released from KRS to canals to save crops

MYSURU, 15 JAN

The Cauvery Neeravari Nigama Limited (CNNL) has been releasing water from the Krishnarajasagar Reservoir to its canals in phases to save standing crops as well as to fill lakes and other water bodies in its command areas of Mysuru, Mandya and Chamarajanagar districts, sources said.

The CNNL has started releasing water on 10 January and it will continue till 28 January, after which there will be a break of 12 days. The officials call this arrangement the Kattu system.

As per the final verdict of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) and a decision taken in a meeting of the Krishnarajasagar (KRS) Reservoir Irrigation Advisory Committee on 7 January, water from the reservoir has been released to the canals to save sugarcane crops in the Achukattu command area of the Visvesvaraya canal network of Krishnarajasagar Reservoir in Mysuru, Mandya and Chamarajanagar districts.

- The CNNL has started releasing water on 10 January and it will continue till 28 January, after which there will be a break of 12 days

Irrigation Department said water will be released only into main canal and branch canals of the Visvesvaraya canal network. The first phase of water release is from 10 to 28 January, the second from 9 to 27 February, the third from 11 to 29 March and fourth from 10 to 28 April. *—Salar News*

Mysuru villagers leave homes over lenders' harassment

MYSURU, 15 JAN

Hundreds of residents from various villages in Nanjangud taluk are fleeing their homes due to the relentless harassment from micro financing agencies over unpaid loans. Villages such as Hullahalli, Ramapura, Kurihundi, Shiramalli, Kaggaluru, Heggadahalli, and Muddalli are being particularly affected as borrowers abandon their properties to escape ongoing intimidation.

Many women involved in self-help groups took out loans from these agencies with the assurance of weekly repayments, but a lack of employment opportunities has left them unable to meet their obligations. *—Salar News*

ED arrests Ch'garh minister Kawasi in 'liquor scam'

RAIPUR, 15 JAN

Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday arrested Chhattisgarh Congress MLA and former excise minister Kawasi Lakhma in connection with an alleged liquor scam, officials said. Slamming the move, Lakhma said he is being implicated in a false case. The federal agency had on 28 December raided the premises of the ex-minister and his son Harish Lakhma in Raipur, Sukma and Dhamtari districts of the state as part of a money laundering investigation into the case. ED subsequently questioned Lakhma, 71, and his son in the case. Lakhma, who was called for questioning to the ED office here in the Pachpedi Naka area on Wednesday, has been arrested, official sources said. The alleged liquor scam in the state, as per ED, was from 2019-22 when Chhattisgarh was ruled by Congress government. Lakhma, a six-time MLA from Konta, was the excise minister then —*PTI*

Ex-WB minister Jyoti gets bail in ration scam case

KOLKATA, 15 JAN

A PMLA court here on Wednesday granted bail to former West Bengal minister Jyoti Priya Mallick in connection with an alleged ration distribution scam being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on a personal bond of Rs 50 lakh. Mallick, who held the Food and Supplies portfolio from 2011 to 2021, was arrested on 27 October, 2023 by the ED from his residence in Salt Lake here in connection with its investigation into the alleged scam. Special judge Prasanta Mukhopadhyay of the PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court granted bail to Mallick on a personal bond of Rs 50 lakh. The former minister was also directed to furnish a bail bond of Rs 50,000 with two sureties of Rs 25,000 each. —*PTI*

MCOCA case: Delhi court denies bail to AAP's Naresh

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

A Delhi court on Wednesday denied bail to AAP leader and Uttam Nagar MLA Naresh Balyan in a case lodged under the stringent MCOCA. The judge passed the order after hearing arguments from the accused as well as the prosecution. The judge in the meantime issued notice to Delhi police on Balyan's plea for signing documents to open a bank account and other documents required to contest upcoming Delhi Assembly elections. The judge would on 22 January hear arguments on a chargesheet filed in the case. Special public prosecutor Akhand Pratap Singh, representing Delhi police, opposed the bail application, claiming the investigation was at a crucial stage in the case, and if granted bail, the accused could hamper the probe—*PTI*

TN Guv honours Thiruvalluvar in saffron

CHENNAI, 15 JAN

Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi, on the occasion of Thiruvalluvar Day on Wednesday, paid floral tributes to a portrait of the saint-poet in saffron prompting Congress leader K Selvaperunthagai to condemn depiction of the savant in saffron as unacceptable and urged the Centre to immediately recall him. In the Raj Bhavan premises, Ravi showered flowers on a decorated portrait, which showed the poet in saffron with religious marks like Rudraksha beads, sacred ash and kumkum. Reacting to it, Tamil Nadu Congress Committee President K Selvaperunthagai said depicting Thiruvalluvar in saffron clothing was "unacceptable". It is against the law to use a drawing of Thiruvalluvar with religious leanings and not using the government recognised portrait." —*PTI*

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister, AICC Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan; Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi and party leader and LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi durung the inauguration of AICC's new headquarters building in New Delhi on Wednesday

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD/PTI

Cong fighting BJP, RSS, Indian state itself: RaGa

BJP flays RaGa for 'anti-India' stand & said his remark reveals 'ugly truth' from Soros' playbook

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said his party was fighting the "BJP, RSS and the Indian state itself", triggering a row with the BJP alleging that everything the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha does or says is in the direction of breaking India and dividing the society.

Speaking at the inauguration of the new Congress headquarters here, Gandhi also hit out at RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, saying his remark that India got "true independence" after the Ram temple consecration amounts to treason and is an insult to every Indian.

"Do not think that we are fighting a fair fight. There is no fairness in this. If you believe that we are fighting a political organisation called the BJP, that we are fighting a political organisation called the RSS, you have not understood what is going on.

"The BJP and the RSS have captured every single institution of our country. We are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian state itself," he said addressing Congress leaders.

The remark drew sharp criticism from the BJP, with party chief and Union minister JP Nadda saying the Congress' "ugly truth" has been exposed by its own leader.

Nadda alleged on X that it is not a secret that Gandhi and his ecosystem have close links with urban Naxals and the deep state who want to "defame, demean and discredit" India.

Addressing party leaders at Indira Gandhi Bhawan, Gandhi said they are fighting this battle of ideologies under difficult circumstances where institutions have been "captured" by the BJP and the RSS and investigative agencies are being used against opposition leaders.

"Mohan Bhagwat has the audacity to say to the nation what he thinks about the independence movement and the Constitution. In fact, what he said yesterday is treason... Because he is stating that the Constitution is invalid and everything, the fight against the British was invalid.

Mallikarjun Kharge also condemned Bhagwat's remarks and warned that "it would become difficult for him to move around in the country if he continues to make such statements". —*PTI*

ANOTHER SEXIST REMARK

Bidhuri: Atishi is running around like 'hirni' in streets

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

BJP candidate Ramesh Bidhuri on Wednesday again targeted Delhi chief minister and his rival from Kalkaji seat Atishi, saying she was running around like a "hirni" (doe) in the streets of the constituency ahead of assembly polls after doing little for the people for years.

Ramesh Bidhuri ***PHOTO: PTI***

Bidhuri, who has often courted controversies with his uncouth remarks, had recently drawn flak for his comments on Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra after which he had expressed regret.

At a BJP rally in Rohini earlier this month, he had accused Atishi of changing her surname from "Marlena" to "Singh" and went on to add that she "changed her father". Hitting back, AAP had said that the BJP would face consequences for "insulting" women and Atishi broke down into tears during a press conference over the unseemly remarks by Bidhuri.

The senior BJP leader, before filing his nomination papers from the Kalkaji Assembly seat on Wednesday, gave a speech in which he targeted the chief minister and AAP for the alleged shortage of water and poor condition of roads in the area.

He said that Atishi was "clinging" to any woman she came across in the streets like she was "meeting a sister separated at Kumbh Mela".

Bidhuri, a former two-time South Delhi MP who was elected MLA thrice from Tughalqabad, earlier this month landed in a controversy over his "sexist" remark that he will construct roads in Kalkaji that are like the "cheeks" of Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. —*PTI*

BJP's Parvesh faces action for 'distributing' shoes to voters

The returning officer for the New Delhi Assembly segment has directed the police to investigate an incident of BJP candidate Parvesh Verma allegedly distributing shoes to voters at a Valmiki temple in violation of the poll code. Citing complaints received about the alleged act of "corruption," the returning officer has instructed the station house office of the area to initiate the action for violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and has sought an action-taken report at the earliest. Police sources confirmed that a non-cognizable report (NCR) has been filed based on the complaint against Verma, and further investigation has been initiated. —*PTI*

Arvind Kejriwal files nomination for Delhi polls, declares Rs 1.73 crore assets worth with no car and house ***PHOTO: PTI***

GOD WILL SAVE ME: KEJRIWAL ON 'SECURITY THREAT'

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Amid intelligence reports that a pro-Khalistan group is plotting an attack against AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, the former Delhi chief minister said on Wednesday that "God will save him" and he is destined to live as long as his "lifeline" allows.

Addressing reporters after filing his nomination for 5 February Delhi Assembly polls from the New Delhi seat, Kejriwal responded to a question on the alleged threat to his life, saying "uparwala bachayega...."

Before filing his nomination, Kejriwal offered prayers at the Prachin Hanuman temple at Connaught Place and told reporters, "Jako Rakhe Saiyan Mar Sake Na Koye (those protected by God cannot be killed by anyone). God is with me."

Meanwhile, with just weeks to go for the Delhi assembly polls, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday changed its candidates for Hari Nagar and Narela constituencies.

The party replaced the outgoing Hari Nagar MLA Rajkumari Dhillon, who was fielded again by the party from the seat, with Surinder Setia. Dinesh Bharadwaj, fielded from Narela, was replaced by Sharad Chauhan.

AAP on Wednesday said the home ministry granting sanction to prosecute Arvind Kejriwal was a "misuse" of power by the BJP and an attempt to defame the ruling party ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls —*PTI*

Panel recommends action against ex-spy 'CC1' in Pannun case

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

PHOTO: X

BA government-appointed high-powered enquiry committee has suggested legal action against an unnamed individual following its investigation into organised criminal and terrorist activities that jeopardised the security of both India and the US. This probe was initiated after allegations surfaced regarding a failed assassination attempt on Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun by Indian agents in New York in 2023.

The individual of interest, Vikash Yadav, a former officer of India's external intelligence agency, RAW, was mentioned by US authorities in connection with the incident. Pannun holds dual citizenship in America and Canada.

In a statement released by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the committee concluded its extensive investigation, which included leads from US authorities and close cooperation between both nations. Despite the thorough review, the MHA refrained from naming the individual against whom legal action is being sought.

The MHA noted that urgent legal procedures were recommended, alongside enhancing systems and protocols to improve India's response capabilities in such matters. The committee's report has been submitted to the government, underlining the need for systematic controls and coordinated action moving forward.

The incident also stirred diplomatic tensions, with US officials expressing serious concerns about India's involvement and New Delhi reportedly reacting with surprise. Further complicating matters, Indian national Nikhil Gupta was arrested in Prague and extradited to the US relating to the assassination plot against Pannun, under US jurisdiction. —*PTI*

SC DISPOSES 2009 PIL ON BSP MAYAWATI'S STATUES

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

In a relief to BSP supremo Mayawati, the Supreme Court on Wednesday disposed of a petition filed in 2009 seeking a probe into the alleged spending of more than Rs 2,000 crore from the Uttar Pradesh government's budget on installing elephant statutes and personal glorification, when she was the chief minister of the state.

The development came on a day Mayawati turned 69.

A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma disposed of the petition filed by two lawyers -- Ravi Kant and Sukumar -- after observing that most of the prayers had become infructuous.

The public interest litigation matter filed by the lawyers had alleged that a total amount of about Rs 2,000 crore was used from the state's budget for 2008-09 and 2009-10, when Mayawati was chief minister, for installing her statues and BSP poll symbol. —*PTI*

SC halts ECI from declaring Bihar council bypoll results

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

- SC has scheduled further hearings for 16 January, where it will consider responses from state council and ethics committee

The Supreme Court of India has put a hold on the declaration of results for the Bihar legislative council by-election, previously held by expelled Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Sunil Kumar Singh. Singh was expelled from the council on 26 July 2023 for disruptive behaviour during a session in which he reportedly sloganeered against Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

A bench consisting of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh received a plea from senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing Singh, who informed the court that the by-election results were due to be announced on 16 January and had been conducted unopposed. The bench ruled that no results should be declared while the court is hearing the case, which has been ongoing since August 2024.

Singhvi argued that if the court were to reverse Singh's expulsion after results were declared, it could lead to a "peculiar situation" with two candidates vying for a single seat. He further contended that the expulsion was disproportionate, and claimed a violation of natural justice, noting that Singh was not granted any opportunity to address the allegations against him.

The Supreme Court has scheduled further hearings for 16 January, where it will consider responses from the state legislative council and the ethics committee before reserving its judgement. —*PTI*

RESTRUCTURING PROCESS

Govt merges CRPF Parl unit with VIP unit

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

A special unit of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), previously tasked with securing Parliament, has been officially disbanded and integrated into the VIP Security Group, following an order from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Tuesday. This development comes after the unit's withdrawal from Parliament security last year.

As part of the restructuring, approximately 1,400 personnel from the dissolved Parliament Duty Group (PDG) will now be part of the VIP Security Group (VSG), which has also received an additional battalion comprising over 1,000 personnel recently reassigned from anti-Naxal operations in Jharkhand.

This development comes after the unit's withdrawal from Parliament security last year ***PHOTO: PTI***

The CRPF's VIP security wing currently safeguards more than 200 high-profile individuals, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah and members of the Gandhi family – Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. In light of the increasing demands placed on the VIP security division, the addition of the PDG personnel has raised its overall strength to more than 8,000 officers.

The PDG was extracted from Parliament in May, with protective responsibilities subsequently transferred to the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF). Though the PDG maintained an informal association with the VIP security wing since its removal, the recent formal order has enabled its manpower to be directed towards protecting high-risk dignitaries.

A senior officer of the PDG reflected on the unit's dedication during its tenure at Parliament, emphasising their commitment in the wake of a significant security breach in 2023. —*PTI*

KTR to face ED on 16 Jan after SC rejects plea

HYDERABAD, 15 JAN

BRS Working President K T Rama Rao is scheduled to appear before the Enforcement Directorate on January 16 for questioning in a money laundering case related to the Formula-E race.

Rama Rao, popularly known as KTR, was issued summons to appear before the ED on January 7. However, he requested two weeks and was subsequently given a new date to appear on January 16.

The probe by the federal agency is linked to alleged irregularities in payments for the proposed Formula-E race to be held in Hyderabad in 2024.

The investigation into Rama Rao pertains to alleged irregularities in payments amounting to about Rs 55 crore, most of which were in foreign currency, in "violation of laid-down procedures" during the previous BRS regime, for the event planned for 2024.

Formula-E race was held in Hyderabad in February 2023. Although the race was initially planned for 2024, it was cancelled after the Congress government assumed office in December 2023. Rama Rao, the prime accused in the case filed by the ACB over alleged irregularities in the Formula-E race, was questioned by on 9 January. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Miscreants try to derail train in Bareilly

BAREILLY, 15 JAN

Miscreants' attempts to derail a train in near Uttar Pradesh's Bijauria railway station failed earlier this week, after a train hit a large stone placed on the tracks on the Bareilly-Pilibhit line, breaking it into two and suffering minor damage to the engine's rail guard, officials said on Wednesday. A tragedy was averted for train No. 75302, which was going from Tanakpur to Bareilly City on Monday, they said, adding that nobody was injured in the incident. Sanjeev Sharma, senior divisional commercial manager of Izzatnagar, said, "An FIR has been lodged to ensure that such incidents are not repeated in the future." Railway officials, accompanied by the Government Railway Police from Pilibhit, visited the site as part of their investigation. —*PTI*

Kerala man 'comes alive' on way to mortuary

KANNUR 15 JAN

A man, believed by his family to be dead and taken to a hospital for further procedures, made a miraculous recovery just minutes before being transferred to the mortuary in this north Kerala district. Pavithran, a 67-year-old from Pachapoika near Koothuparamba, shocked everyone by "coming back to life", even after his family had made arrangements for his funeral the next day. However, just before the "dead body" was taken into the mortuary, a vigilant AKG Memorial Hospital staff member noticed a faint movement of his fingers and immediately alerted Pavithran's relatives and doctors. Pavithran was rushed to the intensive care unit, hospital authorities confirmed.—*PTI*

Drunk govt official runs over three girls in U'khand

DEHRADUN, 15 JAN

A drunk government official ran his car over three minor girls in the Kotabagh block of Uttarakhand's Nainital district, killing one and leaving two others injured, police said on Wednesday. Police apprehended Kotabagh Assistant Block Development Officer Bhupendra Singh while attempting to flee, said local police outpost in-charge Ramesh Chandra Pant. A medical examination confirmed that Singh was drunk at the time of the accident, he said. The girls were identified as sisters Kanak Bora, 17 and Mahi Bora, 14, and their friend Mamta Bhandari, 15, all residents of Nathunagar village in Kotabagh, Pant said. The girls were returning from Uttarayani fair on Monday when the incident took place.—*PTI*

Newlywed kills self after 'harassment over complexion'

MALAPPURAM, 15 JAN

The family of a 19-year-old newlywed woman has accused her husband and family of driving her to suicide by harassing her over her complexion and lack of English proficiency, police said on Wednesday. An officer of Kondotty police station said that the girl's body was buried in the morning as the post-mortem was completed by the previous evening. A case of unnatural death has been registered and investigation is on, the officer added. Meanwhile, the girl's family alleged that she died by suicide due to the mental harassment from her husband and in-laws. A relative said that they came to know what happened after her college professors told them that she was not studying properly and appeared dejected in class. "When we asked her, she told us about the harassment from her husband," the relative said. —*PTI*

India-B'desh to hash out fencing, infiltration issues

The two nations had issued summons to top envoys

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The twice-postponed Director General-level border talks between India and Bangladesh are expected to take place in the national capital from 16 February, with the issue of fencing and rise in infiltration attempts post the regime change in that country being a major subject of discussion, sources said on Wednesday.

A delegation of the Border Guard Bangladesh is scheduled to hold discussions with their counterparts Border Security Force (BSF) between 16 and 19 February as part of the 55th edition of these bi-annual talks.

This will be the first top-level discussion between the two forces post the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on 5 August, 2024.

Bangladesh expressed deep concern over the activities of the BSF vis-a-vis fence erection and border killings PHOTO: x

The issues related to objections raised by Bangladesh over the construction of "agreed upon" single-row fence at about 92 identified patches covering about 95.8 km of the overall 4,096 km international border is expected to be taken up in the meeting, the sources said.

The joint of record of discussions called JRD, that is signed by the chiefs of the BSF and the BGB at the end of these talks, will be framed on the basis of these discussions, they said.

Obstruction to the work of fence construction on this border was underlined last week after India followed by Bangladesh summoned the High Commissioners of the either country in their national capitals.

Bangladesh expressed "deep concern" over the "activities" of the BSF vis-a-vis fence erection and border killings when they called Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma in Dhaka over the weekend. —*PTI*

SEARCH ON FOR 35

Missing from Wayanad landslide declared 'dead'

T'PURAM, 15 JAN

The Kerala government has decided to declare as "deceased" the people who went missing in the devastating landslide in Wayanad last year which will help provide compensation to their families.

The decision comes as a huge relief to the kin of people who were reported missing in the disaster.

According to a government order issued on Tuesday, local-, district- and state-level committees will be formed including revenue department officials to examine the list of missing people.

The local-level committee includes the panchayat secretary, village officer and station house officer of respective police stations.

It will prepare a list of missing people and submit it to the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) for examination.

The DDMA will examine the list and forward it to the state-level committee along with its suggestions. The state-level committee, comprising additional chief secretary (home) and principal secretaries of revenue and local self-government, will examine the list and forward it to the government, the order said.

According to record, 263 people died and 35 people were reported missing in the landslides that occurred on 30 July, 2024.

The order directs the local-level committee to closely examine the FIRs filed in connection with the missing people in the respective police stations. —*PTI*

Non-essential diesel trucks are prohibited from entering Delhi, PHOTO: PTI

GRAP 4 curbs back in Delhi as air worsens

- Unfavourable meteorological conditions, combined with vehicle emissions, paddy-straw burning, firecrackers, and other local pollution sources, lead to hazardous air quality levels in Delhi-NCR during winters.

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The Centre's panel on Delhi-NCR's air quality on Wednesday invoked curbs under stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) amid a sharp dip in air quality due to unfavourable meteorological conditions, according to an official order.

Calm winds, low temperatures and foggy conditions allowed accumulation of pollutants in the region, with the air quality index soaring from 275 on Tuesday to 396 at 6 pm on Wednesday.

The India Meteorological Department and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology predicted that AQI may breach the 400 mark soon.

Accordingly, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) directed authorities in Delhi-NCR to "straightway invoke" all actions under stages 3 and 4 with immediate effect.

Stage 4 curbs include a ban on all construction activities, entry of non-essential polluting trucks into Delhi, and mandatory shifting of school classes, except for classes 10 and 12, to hybrid mode.

Non-essential diesel trucks are prohibited from entering Delhi, while Delhi-registered BS-IV and older diesel-run heavy goods vehicles are banned, except for essential services under Stage 4.

During winters, the Delhi-NCR region enforces restrictions under GRAP, which categorizes air quality into four stages – Stage 1 (Poor, AQI 201-300), Stage 2 (Very Poor, AQI 301-400), Stage 3 (Severe, AQI 401-450), and Stage 4 (Severe Plus, AQI above 450).

Unfavourable meteorological conditions, combined with vehicle emissions, paddy-straw burning, firecrackers, and other local pollution sources, lead to hazardous air quality levels in Delhi-NCR during winters. —*PTI*

IIT WOMAN SCHOLAR 'HARASSED', WORKER HANDED OVER TO POLICE

CHENNAI,, 15 JAN

A woman research scholar of IIT Madras was allegedly "harassed" outside the campus by a worker and male students accompanying her and the general public handed over him to the police, the premium institute said here on Wednesday.

The scholar was allegedly "harassed" on 14 January evening at a tea shop outside the campus in the Velachery-Taramani area, an IIT-Madras statement said. "The male students accompanying the woman scholar, and public at the spot, caught hold of the culprit and called the police. The police apprehended the accused and informed the Institute. —*PTI*

SC notice to govt on poll rules row

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought responses from the Centre and the poll panel on Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh's plea against the recent amendments, including no public access to CCTV, to the 1961 election rules.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar took note of the submissions of senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Ramesh, and issued notices on the plea. It would hear the plea next week.

Singhvi said amendments to the 1961 Conduct of Election Rules were made "very cleverly" and barred any access to CCTV footage claiming it would reveal the identity of the voter.

He said voting choices were never revealed and the CCTV footage couldn't reveal votes.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh filed the writ petition in December challenging the recent amendments to the 1961 rules PHOTO: PTI

The senior lawyer urged the bench to ask the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the Centre to file their responses before the next date of hearing else they would come and say "reply is needed to be filed" on that day.

The Congress leader filed the writ petition in December challenging the recent amendments to the 1961 rules and expressed "hope" that the apex court would help "restore the fast eroding" integrity of the electoral process. The government has tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage besides video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse. —*PTI*

SC: Govt should uplift poor or build cycle tracks?

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked whether the money from the state exchequer should be used for creating housing, health and educational facilities for the poor or laying cycle tracks in the country.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan, which heard a plea for creating separate cycle tracks across the country, observed that development in the country was not uniform.

"Tell us, whether money from the state exchequer should be used on creating residential and educational facilities for the poor or for this (creating separate cycle tracks)?" the bench asked the petitioner's counsel.

"In all major cities, there is acute problem of housing facilities for the poor. People are living in slums. There is lack of health facilities, educational facilities for the poor. Should all these elementary facilities be provided or these cycle tracks?" the court asked.

The bench has posted the arguments to 10 February. —*PTI*

SC stalls Khedkar arrest in UPSC case

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The Supreme Court on Wednesday protected from arrest till 14 February former IAS probationer Puja Khedkar, accused of cheating and wrongly availing OBC and disability quota benefits in the civil services examination.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma issued notice to the Delhi government and the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on Khedkar's plea seeking anticipatory bail.

"Issue notice returnable on February 14, 2025. Till next date of hearing, no coercive steps to be taken against petitioner," directed the bench.

During the hearing, senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for Khedkar, argued the high court made strong observations against her while dismissing her anticipatory bail plea.

The top court said nothing had happened to Khedkar so far and "no had touched her".

Luthra submitted if the matter went to trial, it would end up in a conviction for there were strong findings by the high court. —*PTI*

Consider plea over duplicate entries in voter list: Delhi HC to EC

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the Election Commission (EC) to consider a plea highlighting alleged duplication of names in the capital's voter list and use suitable technology to sort out the issue.

As the counsel of Rashtravadi Aadarsh Mahasangh, the petitioner, remarked that the Delhi elections would be over by the time the EC would consider his plea, a bench of Acting Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said, "before every election, these matters come".

"There is a process for revision of electoral rolls. It can't be done at this stage," the bench said.

PHOTO: ANI

The petitioner said even the "ex-chief minister" was aggrieved by the issue.

Advocate Sidhant Kumar, appearing for the Election Commission, said the petition did not cite a single instance of alleged duplication. He said the Commission has already undertaken the necessary procedure for revision of electoral rolls and even the Supreme Court has considered the issue.

"He said there are two tools. If you find these tools better, consider it. We are only asking you to not close your mind," the court told the EC's counsel.

The court directed the EC and Delhi Chief Election Officer "to consider the averments made in the petition at an appropriate stage. Needless to state that if the Commission finds technological tools that would assist... (it) in eliminating duplicate names, the same would be adopted." —*PTI*

6 flights diverted, 300 delayed amid fog in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Six flights were diverted, more than 300 flights delayed and departures were briefly put on hold at the Delhi airport early morning on Wednesday as low visibility conditions due to dense fog significantly impacted operations.

"Runway visibility at Delhi Airport is improving, and flight operations are gradually resuming," airport operator DIAL said in an update on X at 2.20 pm.

An official said six flights were diverted to Jaipur between 8 am and 10.30 am due to adverse weather conditions in the national capital. —*PTI*

DESPITE BAIL

HC fumes as Chemmanur stays in jail

KOCHI, 15 JAN

The Kerala High Court on Wednesday ticked off prominent businessman Boby Chemmanur for refusing to come out of jail after getting bail a day ago in a sexual harassment case filed by Malayalam actor Honey Rose.

Irked by the businessman's conduct, Justice PV Kunhikrishnan suo motu took up the issue in the morning and warned Chemmanur not to "play games with the High Court" and if bail was granted, it can be cancelled also.

The High Court said that the bail order was uploaded on its website by 4.08 pm on Tuesday and the release order was issued by 4.45 pm. "Why was he retained in jail after that?" it asked.

Chemmanur said many inmates told him they could not get out of prison as they did not have money to execute bail bonds. PHOTO: PTI

"Who does he (Chemmanur) think he is? I know how to get him here. He is creating a drama. He is playing with the High Court. He is declaring war on the judiciary and saying that remand prisoners are stuck there. He thinks everyone can be purchased," Justice Kunhikrishnan said.

The court directed Chemmanur's lawyers whether he made any statement, before the media after his release, that he remained in jail to advocate the cause of the remand prisoners. "If he did, I will issue a notice to cancel his bail. I will tell the police to complete the probe in two weeks and will direct the magisterial court to complete the trial in a month. He can stay in jail during that time," the judge said.

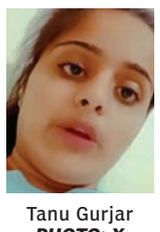
Chemmanur said many inmates told him they could not get out of prison as they did not have money to execute bail bonds. "I told them we can resolve the issue. I stayed back in jail one day for that," he said. —*PTI*

Dad shoots woman dead for rejecting groom of his choice

- The marriage of Tanu Gurjar, the victim, was fixed for 18 January, but she refused to marry the man chosen by her family, Sikarwar said.

GWALIOR, 15 JAN

A 20-year-old woman was allegedly murdered by her father and her cousin for refusing to marry the man chosen by the family in Madhya Pradesh's Gwalior city, police said on Wednesday.



Tanu Gurjar PHOTO: X

The incident took place in Gola ka Mandir area on Tuesday, said City Superintendent of Police Nagendra Singh Sikarwar.

The marriage of Tanu Gurjar, the victim, was fixed for 18 January, but refused to marry the man chosen by her family, Sikarwar said. After a heated argument with her, the woman's father Mahesh Singh Gurjar, 45 shot her with a country-made firearm, while his nephew Rahul shot her with a pistol, he said.

While Rahul fled, Mahesh stayed back at the spot, brandishing the murder weapon. A police team rushed to the house after getting information and arrested him, Sikarwar said.

The woman suffered four bullet injuries, Sikarwar said, adding that a search is on to nab her cousin. —*PTI*

JALLIKATTU IN TAMIL NADU

People try to take control of a bull as they participate in the Jallikattu, the bull taming sport as part of 'Pongal' celebrations at Periya Suriyur village in Tiruchirapalli district, Tamil Nadu, on Wednesday
PHOTO: PTI

B'desh-India tensions hit visas, medical tourism

Ongoing diplomatic tensions between India and Bangladesh have led to significant scaling back of visas and appointment slots for Bangladeshi nationals seeking to travel to India.

Following political unrest and the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, Indian visa centers across Bangladesh were closed indefinitely for security reasons.

In September, over 20,000 Bangladeshi passports were returned following the suspension of visa services by the Indian High Commission in Dhaka in the wake of widespread protests.

Daily visa appointments have dropped from over 7,000 to 500-700, with no clear indication when the situation will stabilise
PHOTO: PTI

Impact on students and medical tourism

Since January, five visa centers in Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Khulna have been operational but only process emergency and humanitarian applications.

Daily visa appointments have dropped from over 7,000 to 500-700, with no clear indication when the situation will stabilise.

India offers 15 categories of visa to Bangladesh, which includes "urgent service."

"We are constantly monitoring the situation and as it normalizes, we will begin our full-fledged visa operations," a foreign ministry official told DW. Other officials said, on condition of anonymity, that proper issuance of visa services will be on hold for the moment.

Strained relations

Tensions between India and Bangladesh have escalated further in recent days over border management issues.

Following allegations that India was planning to construct fences at five locations along the border, Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma was summoned by Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

India responded by summoning Bangladesh's Acting High Commissioner Md. Nural Islam and reaffirmed that its border security measures were in line with existing agreements. The standoff has disrupted travel, sparking significant cancellations and drops in bookings.

Medical tourism impacted

The ongoing socio-political unrest has also taken its toll on medical tourism. Many Bangladeshis travel to India for medical treatment. A liberalized visa process also allowed for medical attendant visas, allowing patients to bring family or friends with them. CareEdge Ratings, a knowledge-based analytical group, notes a decline in the number of Bangladeshi patients at major Indian hospitals, with some reporting drops of 25 per cent to 40 per cent.

Bangladeshi Hindus still waiting to cross into India

Fewer Bangladeshi medical tourists have travelled to major cities like Kolkata, Chennai and Bengaluru.

The restrictions have significantly impacted thousands of Bangladeshi patients who depend on India's cost-effective medical services. Many have sought alternative treatment options in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Turkey. "Restrictions in mobility between countries are often the fallout of political disagreement. India and Bangladesh will need to get into an extended dialogue to address the multiple issues that have arisen with the change of government in Bangladesh," Ajay Bisaria, a former envoy to Pakistan,said. "Ultimately, it is about rebuilding trust. These are easily reversible problems, but some give and take, dialogue and negotiation would be required to promote mobility and ease the visa regime in 2025," said Bisaria.

Students face logistical problems

In addition, Bangladeshi students hoping to study in European countries like Finland, Romania, and the Czech Republic are currently impeded by the visa processing issues.

Many of these countries do not maintain embassies in Bangladesh, forcing students to travel to India for visa application submission and identity authentication.

This requirement has become a logistical nightmare, with many students are unable to secure Indian visas.

Over 1,500 Bangladeshi students have received university offer letters but are stuck in limbo, unable to complete their visa applications on time.

During a meeting with EU diplomats in December, Muhammad Yunus, the chief adviser of Bangladesh's interim government, urged European countries to relocate their visa centres from New Delhi to Dhaka or to another neighbouring country. *—DW News*

SALAR سالار

Obesity in children linked to childhood trauma

Children with traumatic experiences in their early lives have a higher risk of obesity. But as our new research shows, this risk can be reduced through positive experiences.

Childhood traumatic experiences are alarmingly common. Our analysis of data from nearly 5,000 children in the Growing Up in New Zealand study revealed almost nine out of ten (87 per cent) faced at least one significant source of trauma by the time they were eight years old.

Multiple adverse experiences were also prevalent, with one in three children (32 per cent) experiencing at least three traumatic events.

Childhood trauma includes a range of experiences such as physical and emotional abuse, peer bullying and exposure to domestic violence. It also includes parental substance abuse, mental illness, incarceration, separation or divorce and ethnic discrimination.

We found children from financially disadvantaged households and Mori and Pasifika had the highest prevalence of nearly all types of adverse experiences, as well as higher overall numbers of adversities.

The consequences of these experiences were far-reaching. Children who experienced at least one adverse event were twice as likely to be obese by age eight. The risk increased with the number of traumatic experiences. Children with four or more adverse experiences were nearly three times more likely to be obese.

Notably, certain traumatic experiences (including physical abuse and parental domestic violence) related more strongly to obesity than others. This highlights the strong connection between early-life adversity and physical health outcomes.

One potential explanation could be that the accumulation of early stress in children's family, school and social environments is associated with greater psychological distress. This in turn makes children more likely to adopt unhealthy weight-related behaviours.

This includes consuming excessive high-calorie "comfort" foods such as fast food and sugary drinks, inadequate intake of nutritious foods, poor sleep, excessive screen time and physical inactivity. In our research, children who experienced adverse events were more likely to adopt these unhealthy behaviours. These, in turn, were associated with a higher risk of obesity.

Despite these challenges, our research also explored a promising area: the protective and mitigating effects of positive experiences.

We defined positive experiences as: parents in a committed relationship, mothers interacting well with their children, mothers involved in social groups, children engaged in enriching experiences and activities such as visiting libraries or museums and participating in sports and community events, children living in households with routines and rules, including those regulating bedtime, screen time and mealtimes, children attending effective early childhood education.

The findings were encouraging. Children with more positive experiences were significantly less likely to be obese by age eight.

Positive experiences can help mitigate the negative effects of childhood trauma. But a minimum of four positive experiences was required to significantly counteract the impact of adverse events.

Policymakers, schools and families all have a role to play. Community-based programmes, such as after-school activities, healthy relationship initiatives and mental health services should be prioritised to support vulnerable families.

Trauma-informed care is crucial, particularly for children from disadvantaged households who face higher levels of adversity and fewer positive experiences. Trauma-informed approaches are especially crucial for addressing the effects of domestic violence and other adverse childhood experiences.

At the family level, parents can establish stable routines, participate in social networks and engage children in enriching activities. Schools and early-childhood education providers also play a key role in fostering supportive environments that help children build resilience and recover from trauma. Policymakers should invest in resources that promote positive experiences across communities, addressing inequalities that leave some children more vulnerable than others. By creating nurturing environments, we can counterbalance the impacts of trauma and help children lead healthier, more fulfilling lives. *—PTI*

Childhood trauma includes a range of experiences such as physical and emotional abuse, peer bullying and exposure to domestic violence
PHOTO: AI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Pakistani Hindu refugees all set to cast their first vote in Delhi polls

- As the elections approach, these new citizens are not only celebrating their right to vote but also voicing their expectations from the government. They want better housing, access to quality education, affordable utilities and job opportunities

Issues such as sanitation, electricity costs, education and housing dominate the concerns of the refugees
PHOTO: PTI

In the crowded, narrow lanes lined with makeshift homes near Delhi's resettlement colony -- Majnu-ka-tilla, a sense of pride and "indebtedness" pervades as a group of Pakistani Hindu refugees prepare to cast their votes for the first time in the country they now call home.

These men and women, who fled persecution in Pakistan, are beaming with excitement at the prospect of participating in the India democratic process -- a right they have long yearned for.

Having endured years of hardships and discrimination in Pakistan, they now feel a profound sense of relief and belonging in India.

For them, this election is not just about voting -- it is a symbolic assertion of their identity as Indian citizens. Many of these families settled in Delhi since 2013 are now witnessing their dreams of a dignified life and political participation coming true.

Satram,22, who runs a small shop selling mobile covers outside the settlement, expressing his excitement said, " I have been living here since 2013 and will vote in the elections. It feels good to finally be a part of the voting population. My parents and I will vote as per our Pradhan's instruction. Despite the challenges, we believe we can manage and move forward."

The struggles of these refugees are not confined to the past. Their lives in Delhi are a delicate balance between hope and survival. Issues such as sanitation, electricity costs, education and housing dominate their concerns.

Mohini, 18, who dropped out of school due to financial difficulties, shared her aspirations.

"I always wanted to become a police officer but that dream seems impossible now. All I expect from the government is some skill based opportunities so that I can earn a living with dignity," she said.

For women like Baldevi, 35, voting signifies not just empowerment but also a chance to address their community's challenges.

"We have been living here for over a decade and want the government to build permanent homes for us. This area is familiar. We have built our lives here. Moving elsewhere would mean starting from scratch," she said.

While some residents are gearing up to vote, a new batch of refugees has recently arrived, facing uncertainty and hardships as they await citizenship.

Many like Shiviram, 36, who arrived just a month ago, are hopeful about their future in India.

"I want to stay here and work as a tailor. I have applied for a visa extension and I hope to get an Aadhaar card soon. That will open many opportunities for me," he said.

For many of these refugees, their votes will reflect collective decisions, often guided by their community leader.

Janki, 45, whose family of 17 has been living in the settlement for over a decade, said "eight of us have obtained citizenship and will vote for Viksit Bharat".

"He gave us citizenship and helped us for ration cards. We are grateful, but we also want space to live and opportunities for our children to grow," she added.

As the elections approach, these new citizens are not only celebrating their right to vote but also voicing their expectations from the government. They want better housing, access to quality education, affordable utilities and job opportunities.

"We don't want much, just a dignified life and a chance for our children to build a better future," said Maya (27), who has applied for citizenship and is waiting for her voter ID.

"Bharat mata ki jai," exclaimed Radha (19), who eagerly awaits the polling day.

The election marks a significant chapter for these refugees. As they prepare to cast their first votes, they do so with gratitude, hope and a firm resolve to contribute to the nation they now call home. *—PTI*

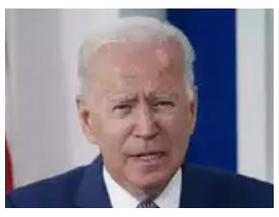


PHOTO: PTI

US border crossings decline as Biden term ends

WASHINGTON DC, 15 JAN

US officials have revealed the latest border data, indicating the Biden administration will conclude its term without an anticipated rise in illegal border crossings. In December, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) recorded 47,300 illegal crossings, an increase from November's 46,612, yet approaching the lowest levels since July 2020. The first two weeks of January showed a decline, with roughly 45 per cent fewer crossings than in December. The highest activity was noted in South Texas, with arrests doubling from about 5,000 in November to over 10,000 in December, despite intensified security. In December, border arrests surpassed those processed for asylum via the CBP One app, used by nearly 936,500 individuals since January 2023. *—PTI*

SpaceX launches two private lunar landers

CAPE CANAVERAL, 15 JAN

SpaceX successfully launched two lunar landers on early Wednesday morning from NASA's Kennedy Space Centre, marking a significant step for US and Japanese firms venturing into lunar exploration. The Tokyo-based ispace is attempting its second mission following a previous crash two years ago, carrying a rover designed to collect lunar soil samples and test potential resources for future explorers. Texas-based Firefly Aerospace is also onboard, conducting ten experiments for NASA, including a vacuum for soil collection and a drill to measure subsurface temperatures. Firefly's lander, dubbed Blue Ghost, aims to touchdown first in March at Mare Crisium, while ispace's larger Resilience will reach the moon by late May or early June. *—PTI*

B'desh HC reduces ULFA leader's sentence to 14 yrs

DHAKA, 15 JAN

The Bangladesh High Court has reduced the life sentence of ULFA leader Paresh Barua to 14 years and acquitted former BNP minister Lutfozzaman Babar in connection with a 2004 attempted arms smuggling case. On 18 December 2022, the court commuted Barua's death sentence, which was issued in absentia in 2014. Barua, who is believed to be residing in China, is on India's National Investigation Agency's wanted list. The case involved the seizure of ten truckloads of weapons, including over 27,000 grenades and 1.1 million rounds of ammunition, in April 2004. Additionally, the High Court commuted the sentences of five other convicts and dismissed appeals from three deceased defendants. *—PTI*

UK inflation eases in Dec, fuelling rate cuts speculations

LONDON, 15 JAN

UK inflation unexpectedly dropped to 2.5 per cent in December, sparking renewed speculation about potential interest rate cuts by the Bank of England next month. The Office for National Statistics revealed that the decrease, down from 2.6 per cent in November, was primarily driven by easing price pressures in the services sector, which constitutes approximately 80 per cent of the UK economy. Despite the decline, inflation remains above the Bank's target of 2 per cent. A cut in the main interest rate from 4.75 per cent could alleviate recent volatility in British government bond markets, where 10-year borrowing costs recently surged to a 16-year high. This intensified pressure on Treasury chief Rachel Reeves to consider spending cuts. *—PTI*

S Korean Prez Yoon arrested after martial law attempt

Yoon is the 1st sitting president in S Korea to be apprehended

SEOUL, 15 JAN

South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol has been detained in a significant law enforcement operation at the presidential compound, following his declaration of martial law last month. Yoon was taken into custody after investigators from the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials succeeded in breaching the compound's security this Wednesday.

In a recorded video message prior to his detention, Yoon claimed that the anti-corruption agency lacked the authority to investigate his actions, stating, "the rule of law has completely collapsed in this country." Yoon, the country's first sitting president to be apprehended, had been holed up in the Hannam-dong residence in Seoul for weeks, asserting his intention to "fight to the end" against efforts to remove him from power.

Investigators make way to the residence of impeached President Yoon to execute a warrant to detain Yoon on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials said Yoon was brought into custody about five hours after investigators arrived at the presidential compound and about three hours after they successfully entered the residence, in their second attempt to detain him over his imposition of martial law. Yoon's legal challenges are far from over. The anti-corruption agency has 48 hours to file for a formal arrest on charges of attempting rebellion related to his martial law declaration, and if unsuccessful, Yoon will be released.

A series of black SUVs, some equipped with sirens, were seen leaving the presidential compound with police escorts.

His presidential powers were suspended following impeachment by parliament on 14 December, with the case currently pending in the Constitutional Court, which could formally remove Yoon from office or reject the case and reinstate him. Some police officers used ladders to climb over rows of buses placed by the presidential security service near the compound's entrance, and then the investigators began moving up the hilly compound.

The atmosphere around the compound was tense, with supporters of Yoon and his opponents staging competing protests nearby.

Lawmakers from Yoon's People Power Party have decried the detention efforts as unlawful, while the opposition Democratic Party hailed it as a crucial step towards restoring democracy. *—PTI*

Indian-origin nurse seriously injured in UK stabbing

LONDON, 15 JAN

An Indian-origin nurse, Achamma Cherian, is in critical condition following a brutal attack with a pair of scissors during her night shift at the Acute Medical Unit of Royal Oldham Hospital in Greater Manchester. The incident occurred on Saturday night, leading to the arrest of 37-year-old Rumon Haque, who has since been charged with attempted murder and possession of a bladed article. He is currently remanded in custody and is set to appear at Manchester Crown Court next month.

According to Greater Manchester Police, Cherian, who is in her 50s, sustained severe injuries described as "life-changing" and remains hospitalised for treatment. The police's statement indicated that they were not seeking any additional suspects in connection with the attack.

Achamma Cherian *PHOTO: X*

- According to Police, Cherian sustained severe injuries described as "life-changing" and remains hospitalised. The statement indicated that they were not seeking any additional suspects in the attack

Detective Superintendent Matt Walker expressed heartfelt concern for the injured nurse, stating, "Our priority remains supporting her, her family, and her colleagues at this difficult time." Detective Sergeant Craig Roters labelled the incident as serious, emphasising the critical condition of the victim.

UK Health Secretary Wes Streeting took to social media to voice his shock, stating, "Nurses are the backbone of our NHS and should be able to care for patients without fear of violence." He reassured that the Department of Health remains in contact with the Trust and will provide updates as needed.

Heather Caudle, Chief Nursing Officer at Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust, expressed deep sadness over the incident, stating that they were focused on supporting the affected nurse and her family.

Despite the attack, services at Royal Oldham Hospital remain operational. *—PTI*

Iran Prez denies plot to kill Trump, urges for peace

IRAN, 15 JAN

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has denied suggestions that his country plotted to kill United States President-elect Donald Trump after two previous attempts on his life in 2024.

In an interview with US media outlet NBC News aired on Tuesday, Pezeshkian also insisted that Iran's nuclear programme is peaceful and warned Trump against risking "war". The interview with the Iranian president, widely viewed as centrist, was aired less than a week before the inauguration of Trump, who during his first term implemented tough policies against Iran.

Masoud Pezeshkian *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

Pezeshkian told NBC: "We have never attempted this [the assassination bid on Trump] to begin with and we never will.In November, the US Department of Justice charged an Iranian man in connection with an alleged plot by Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to assassinate Trump. Law enforcement thwarted the alleged plan before any attack was carried out.

Trump said last year during the US election campaign that Iran might have been behind attempts to kill him. Investigators have found no evidence of Iranian involvement in either. *—Agencies*

Japan, Philippines urge Trump to engage in Asia

MANILA, 15 JAN

Japan and the Philippines will convey to US president-elect Donald Trump the urgent need for the US to remain committed to help uphold the rule of law in an Asian region where security concerns have become "increasingly severe," Japan's top diplomat said Wednesday.

The US, Japan and the Philippines have been building an alliance under outgoing President Joe Biden since last year to deal with China's increasingly aggressive actions in the disputed South China Sea and East China Sea.

Trump's "America First" foreign policy thrust has triggered concerns about the scale and depth of US commitment to the region. *—PTI*

B'desh SC acquits former PM Zia in corruption case

DHAKA, 15 JAN

The Bangladesh Supreme Court has acquitted former Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in a corruption case, overturning a previous 10-year prison sentence handed down by the High Court. The ruling, delivered by a bench led by Chief Justice Dr Syed Refaat Ahmed, was a result of Zia's appeal against the High Court's verdict.

The Supreme Court's decision also applies to Zia's son, Acting Chairman of the BNP Tarique Rahman, and several other accused in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case, with the court stating that the prosecution appeared motivated by revenge.

Zia, 79, had initially received five years of imprisonment in February 2018 for allegedly embezzling government funds; this was later increased to ten years by the High Court. *—PTI*

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Amid the attacks, Ukraine residents are asked to seek shelter and stay updated through official channels *PHOTO: X*

Ukraine faces power cuts amid Russian attacks

KYIV, 15 JAN

Ukraine faced a significant aerial attack from Russia on Wednesday, prompting emergency power cuts across several regions. Herman Halushchenko, the Ukrainian energy minister, reported that the onslaught continued to terrorise citizens, urging residents to seek shelter and stay updated through official channels.

The state energy company, Ukrenergo, announced emergency outages in Kharkiv, Sumy, Poltava, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Kirovohrad regions. Early Wednesday, missile strikes targeted energy infrastructure in Lviv, with Mayor Andrii Sadovyi confirming the detection of cruise missiles during the attack. Fortunately, no casualties or significant damage were reported, but the incident intensified the strain on Ukraine's energy systems, which have been regularly targeted throughout the ongoing conflict.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was visiting Poland on Wednesday to discuss a sensitive historical issue—the exhumation of Polish victims of WWII massacres committed by Ukrainian nationalists. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk welcomed Zelenskyy and announced progress towards resolving this contentious matter, which has long strained Polish-Ukrainian relations.

The exhumation decision comes amidst two countries' cooperative efforts, particularly as Poland holds the rotating presidency of the European Union. The Freedom and Democracy Foundation plans to commence exhumation work in Ukraine in April, a crucial step in addressing a historical grievance that sees Poland seeking restitution and recognition following the tragic events of the past. *— PTI*

Australia warns action if citizen is hurt

Melbourne, 15 Jan

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Wednesday his government will take the "strongest action possible" if Russia has harmed an Australian who was taken prisoner while fighting for Ukraine. Video posted on social media in December showed Oscar Jenkins (32) dressed in military uniform with his hands bound being questioned and struck by a Russian interrogator. Australian authorities were seeking comment from Russia on reports that the Melbourne school teacher had been killed since he became a prisoner of war. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Fire tornadoes pose fresh threat to LA

SAN FRANCISCO, 15 JAN

Firefighters in California are bracing for the rare but perilous phenomenon of fire tornadoes, as high winds and extremely dry conditions create a "particularly dangerous situation" for wildfires. The National Weather Service has issued an advisory indicating that any new fires could expand rapidly. Fire tornadoes—also referred to as fire whirls or firenados—are not officially defined by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, but a fire whirl is described as a "spinning vortex column of ascending hot air and gases" that can carry smoke, debris, and flame. According to meteorologist Leila Carvalho, these events can result from strong wind shear interacting with localized low-pressure systems. It can enhance the intensity of wildfires by drawing in air, resulting in destruction akin to traditional tornadoes. A notable incident in 2018 involved a fire tornado near Redding that killed a firefighter and featured winds of up to 143 mph. *—PTI*

UNDERPAY $150M

SEC sues Musk for delayed X disclosure

NEW YORK, 15 JAN

The US Securities and Exchange Commission has sued billionaire Elon Musk, saying he failed to disclose his ownership of Twitter stock in a timely manner in early 2022, before buying the social media site.

As a result, the SEC alleges, Musk was able to underpay "by at least USD 150 million" for shares he bought after he should have disclosed his ownership of more than 5 per cent of Twitter's shares. Musk bought Twitter in October 2022 and later renamed it X.

Musk started amassing Twitter shares in early 2022, and by March of that year, he owned more than 5 per cent. At this point, the complaint says, he was required by law to disclose his ownership but he failed to do so until 4 April, 11 days after the report was due.

- Musk owned more than 5 per cent of X shares in 2022 March and he was required by law to disclose his ownership but he failed to do so until 4 April

After Musk signed a deal to acquire Twitter in 2022, he tried to back off, leading the firm to sue him to force him to go through it *PHOTO: X*

Representatives for X and Musk did not immediately return a message for comment.

After Musk signed a deal to acquire Twitter in April 2022, he tried to back out of it, leading the company to sue him to force him to go through with the acquisition.

The has SEC said that starting in April 2022, it authorised an investigation into whether any securities laws were broken in connection with Musk's purchases of Twitter stock and his statements and SEC filings related to the company. Before it filed the lawsuit, the SEC went to court in an attempt to compel Musk to testify as part of an investigation into his purchase of Twitter.

The SEC's current chair, Gary Gensler, plans to step down from his post on 20 January and it is not clear if the new administration will continue the lawsuit. *—PTI*

Marburg outbreak kills 8 in Tanzania: WHO

DODOMA, 15 JAN

The World Health Organisation said Wednesday an outbreak of suspected Marburg disease has killed eight people in a remote part of northern Tanzania.

"We are aware of 9 cases so far, including 8 people who have died," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement. "We would expect further cases in coming days as disease surveillance improves."

Like Ebola, the Marburg virus originates in fruit bats and spreads between people through close contact with the bodily fluids of infected individuals or with surfaces, such as contaminated bed sheets.

Without treatment, Marburg can be fatal in up to 88 per cent of people who fall ill with the disease. Symptoms include fever, muscle pains, diarrhea, vomiting and in some cases death from extreme blood loss. There is no authorised vaccine or treatment for Marburg.

PHOTO: XAJEnglish

WHO said its risk assessment for the suspected outbreak in Tanzania is high at national and regional levels but low globally. There was no immediate comment from Tanzanian health authorities. *—PTI*

Mkts log gain for 2nd day; Sensex climbs over 200 pts

NTPC, Power Grid, Kotak Mahindra Bank are the gainers

MUMBAI, 15 JAN

Benchmark indices Sensex and ticked higher for the second straight session on Wednesday, buoyed by buying in bellwether stock Reliance Industries, Zomato and Kotak Bank amid a largely firm trend in global markets.

However, elevated crude oil prices in the international markets and buying by foreign investors weighed on market sentiment, traders said.

The 30-share BSE index climbed 224.45 points or 0.29 per cent to close at 76,724.08. During the day, it jumped 491.42 points or 0.64 per cent to 76,991.05.

As many as 2,150 stocks advanced while 1,806 declined and 108 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty advanced 37.15 points or 0.16 per cent to 23,213.20.

"The domestic market continues to be volatile on account of elevated US bond yields, strengthening dollar, and increasing FIIs outflows. Global markets are cautious ahead of the US December CPI inflation data, which is anticipated to be in the elevated range in the short term, limiting the US Fed's ability to cut rates.

"Also, a rise in oil prices and dollar appreciation is likely to affect domestic inflation in the near future," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the Sensex blue-chip pack, Zomato jumped over 4 per cent. NTPC, Power Grid, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Maruti, Tech Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro, Reliance Industries and Adani Ports were the other big gainers.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank and Tata Motors were among the laggards.

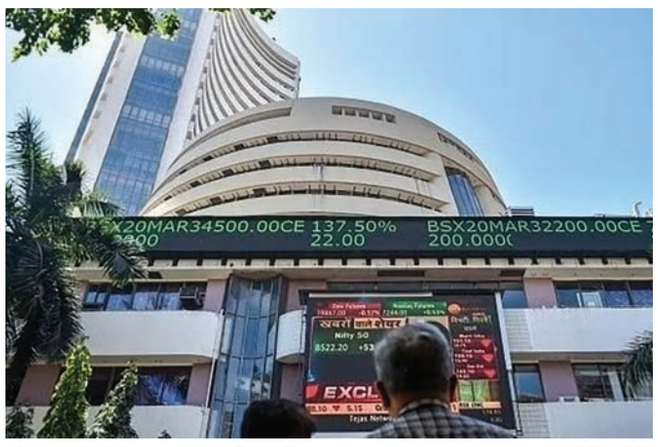
The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.34 per cent, and the midcap index went up by 0.11 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, utilities jumped 2.45 per cent, power (1.75 per cent), realty (1.58 per cent), services (0.98 per cent), BSE Focused IT (0.74 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.62 per cent).

Auto, oil & gas, FMCG and healthcare were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Hong Kong settled in the positive territory, while Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai ended lower.

European markets were quoting higher. US markets ended mostly higher on Tuesday. —*PTI*



Mahindra & Mahindra and Bajaj Finserv are the laggards **PHOTO: PTI**

Rupee settles 13P higher at 86.40 against USD

MUMBAI, 15 JAN

The rupee extended its recovery for the second straight session and settled with a gain of 13 paise at 86.40 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking favourable cues from domestic equity markets and softening crude oil prices. The American currency index also descended from a record peak, adding to the gaining momentum in the local unit, though it remained under pressure from continuous exit of foreign institutional investors, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.50 and slipped to the intraday low of 86.55 against the greenback. It also touched A high of 86.28 before ending the session at 86.40 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 13 paise from its previous close. —*PTI*

Gold rises ₹220 to ₹80,800 per 10g; silver rules flat

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Gold prices increased Rs 220 to Rs 80,800 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid a rise in precious metal rates in the global markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal finished at Rs 80,580 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. However, silver was trading flat at Rs 91,700 per kg on Wednesday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose by Rs 220 to Rs 80,400 per 10 grams. It had settled at Rs 80,180 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Traders said gold rallied due to fresh demand from local jewellers and a strong trend in the overseas markets. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery rallied Rs 470 or 0.6 per cent to Rs 78,626 per 10 grams. —*PTI*

ITA submits Darjeeling tea white paper to WB govt

KOLKATA, 15 JAN

The Indian Tea Association (ITA) has presented a comprehensive white paper to the West Bengal government, addressing the challenges and opportunities within the Darjeeling tea industry. A delegation of ITA officials met with Labour Minister Moloy Ghatak to discuss the findings, which offer an extensive analysis of the industry's current status. The document outlines critical issues such as production difficulties, market dynamics, and the impact of climate change. It highlights the pressing need for strategic intervention and financial assistance from both central and state governments, emphasising the cultural significance of Darjeeling tea as more than just an economic asset. The ITA noted that the industry's viability is threatened by low productivity due to ageing plants and declining profitability. —*PTI*

ABFRL to raise ₹2,378 cr from promoters, market

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd (ABFRL) has received board approval to raise Rs 2,378.75 crore through a combination of promoter investments and market participation. The company plans to issue up to 4.08 crore shares at Rs 317.45 each, totalling Rs 1,297.50 crore, to Pilani Investment and Industries Corporation, a promoter group entity. Additionally, ABFRL will offer up to 3.96 crore shares at Rs 272.37 each to Qualified Institutional Buyers, aiming to raise Rs 1,081.25 crore from non-promoter investors, including various Fidelity funds. An extraordinary general meeting has been scheduled for 13 February 2025 to seek shareholder consent for the fundraising initiative. Following this announcement, shares of ABFRL were trading slightly higher at Rs 270.20, marking a 0.04 per cent increase from the previous closing price on the National Stock Exchange (NSE).—*PTI*

Imports rose by about 5 per cent year-on-year to USD 59.95 billion in December **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

Exports down 1% in Dec; trade deficit narrows to $22B

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

India's exports in December 2024 contracted for the second month in a row by about one per cent year-on-year to USD 38.01 billion due to global uncertainties, while the trade deficit narrowed to USD 21.94 billion.

According to the commerce ministry data, imports rose by about 5 per cent year-on-year to USD 59.95 billion in December.

Cumulatively, during April-December this fiscal, exports recorded a growth of 1.6 per cent to USD 321.71 billion and imports by 5.15 per cent to USD 532.48 billion.

Trade deficit, the difference between imports and exports, during April-December widened to USD 210.77 billion from USD 189.74 billion during the same period previous fiscal.

Briefing the media on the latest data, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said that India's exports are doing better than other countries both in goods and services.

"This shows resiliency of our exports. In all the three quarters of this this fiscal also, we have done better. We are doing much better in non-petroleum exports," he told reporters here.

The ministry has recently held a meeting with commercial wings of Indian Missions in 20 countries to deliberate on issues impacting exports and ways to resolve them.

These 20 countries account for about 60 per cent of India's exports. —*PTI*

India, UK looking to resume talks on proposed trade deal in Feb

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

India and the UK are exploring convenient dates to resume the talks for the proposed free trade agreement in early February, according to the commerce ministry.

The talks for the proposed FTA began in January 2022. The 14th round of talks stalled as the two nations stepped into their general election cycles.

"Mutually convenient date is being explored for the next round of negotiations for early February," the ministry informed on Wednesday.

The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to USD 21.34 billion in 2023-24 from USD 20.36 billion in 2022-23.

Regarding a similar agreement with the European Union (EU), the ministry said that the tenth round of talks is scheduled from 10-14 March in Brussels.

The two sides are negotiating a free trade agreement, an investment protection agreement and an agreement on geographical indications (GIs).

PHOTO:WIKIPEDIA

In the ninth round, both sides discussed trade issues covering goods, services, investment and government procurement along with necessary rules such as rules of origin, SPS (sanitary and phytosanitary), and technical barriers to trade.

In June 2022, India and the 27-nation EU bloc resumed the negotiations after a gap of over eight years. It was stalled in 2013 due to differences over several issues.

The total trade has surpassed USD 200 billion in 2023. India exported USD 75.18 billion in goods and USD 31.13 billion in services to the EU, while the EU exported USD 63.44 billion in goods and USD 31.35 billion in services to India. Further on the India-Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) free trade agreement, it said that the two sides are currently in the process of finalising terms of references for the pact.

The five members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia.

In such agreements, two or more trading partners either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. These agreements provide greater market access to Indian goods and services.

Russia is the top trading partner of India in the bloc. India's exports to Russia stood at USD 4.26 billion in 2023-24, while imports were USD 61.43 billion due to an increase in crude oil imports.

On the progress in talks for review of free trade agreement in goods between India and ASEAN, Additional Secretary in the ministry Rajesh Agarwal said that the next round of meeting is scheduled from 10 February onwards in Indonesia. —*PTI*

India, Oman all set to finalise trade deal

MUSCAT, 15 JAN

India and Oman are poised to finalise a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) this year, aimed at reducing tariffs and enhancing bilateral trade. The momentum for the negotiations was boosted after Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tarik visited India over a year ago. Omani Commerce Minister Qais bin Mohammad Al-Yousef expressed hope that the ambitious trade pact, which has already seen multiple negotiation rounds, will significantly bolster investment and trade relations.

India has become one of Oman's top trading partners, ranking as the fourth largest market for Oman's crude oil exports and third for non-oil exports in 2023. A recent negotiation round in New Delhi yielded progress in various areas, and Al-Yousef highlighted strong interest from Indian investors.

In alignment with Oman's 'Vision 2040', the Sultanate aims to diversify its economy beyond oil revenues. —*PTI*

India's fiscal conditions may weaken credit strength by 2025: Moody's

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Moody's Ratings has highlighted concerns over India's fiscal stability, predicting that it will continue to constrain the country's credit strength through 2025.

A report on Asia Pacific economies indicates that despite steady growth and inflation, India faces significant challenges, including elevated debt levels, which are expected to exceed the Baa-rated median of approximately 57 per cent. The report also notes that ongoing tensions in US-China relations may present opportunities for India, as trade and investment flows could shift away from China towards India and Southeast Asian nations. —*PTI*

- Report also notes that ongoing tensions in US-China ties present opportunities for India

US-India Tax forum proposes reforms for Budget

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

As India prepares for the Union Budget 2025-26, the US-India Tax Forum has unveiled an ambitious set of proposals aimed at enhancing the country's economic standing. The Forum, comprising around 200 member companies, serves as a platform for dialogue between Indian policymakers, tax experts, and the business community.

Chairperson Tarun Bajaj emphasised the need for reforms that foster investor confidence and simplify the tax regime amid global economic challenges. Recommendations include streamlining the Tax Deduction at Source to two or three rates, aligning tax rates for foreign banks with domestic institutions, and introducing 10 per cent tax rate on dividend income for Foreign Portfolio Investors. Ir advocates for rates for greenfield manufacturing and improvements to GIFT City as a global financial hub. Simplification of indirect taxation and a three-tier customs tariff structure are suggested to attract investments. This approach aims to facilitate India's vision of becoming a USD 5 trillion economy and reinforce its position as a lead player in the global market. —*ANI*

PHOTO:PIXABAY

ICRA URGES GOVT TO TARGET ₹11L CR IN BUDGET

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

ICRA, a prominent rating agency, has recommended that the government set a capital expenditure (capex) target of Rs 11 lakh crore for the next fiscal year, alongside inflation-adjusted personal income tax relief to stimulate consumer spending. Chief Economist Aditi Nayar expressed concern that the previous year's capex target of Rs 11.11 lakh crore is expected to miss its mark by approximately Rs 1.4 lakh crore.

According to Nayar, maintaining the capex target at this level is crucial, given that current fiscal spending between April and November 2024 has amounted to only 46 per cent of the budgeted estimates. —*PTI*

Vedanta Resources raises $1.1B through new bond issuance

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Anil Agarwal's Vedanta Resources has successfully raised USD 1.1 billion through a new bond offering aimed at prepaying existing obligations, as announced in a filing with the Singapore exchange. Their wholly owned subsidiary, Vedanta Resources Finance II plc, executed a dual tranche issuance in the international debt capital markets.

Since September 2024, Vedanta has raised a total of USD 3.1 billion in USD bonds. The latest issuance comprises two tranches: a USD 550 million tranche with a 5.5-year tenor at an interest rate of 9.475 per cent and another USD 550 million tranche with an 8.25-year tenor at 9.850 per cent. These tranches received overwhelming investor interest, attracting final orders of USD 3.4 billion from over 135 accounts, resulting in an oversubscription of 3.1 times.

The proceeds are earmarked for the prepayment of Vedanta's outstanding bonds, associated transaction costs, and servicing other debts. Major investors hailed from the US, EMEA (Europe, the Middle East and Africa), and Asia.

Moody's Ratings recently upgraded Vedanta's corporate family rating to B1 from B2, while S&P Global assigned a preliminary 'B' rating to its senior unsecured notes. The recent bond issuances highlight Vedanta's enhanced access to capital markets and reflect growing investor confidence in the company's strategic measures, according to Moody's Vice President, Nidhi Dhruv. —*PTI*

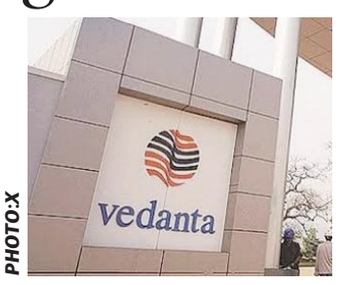


PHOTO:X

- Moody's Ratings recently upgraded Vedanta's corporate family rating to B1 from B2, while S&P Global assigned a preliminary 'B' rating to its senior unsecured notes

FAITH MEETS COMMERCE

Consumer goods brands' compete for attention at Mahakumbh

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

With record numbers of devotees flocking to the Mahakumbh Mela at Sangam—the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati—consumer goods companies are seizing the opportunity to showcase their brands. Major players such as Dettol, Dabur, Pepsico, Coca-Cola, ITC, and Reliance have established impressive displays and resting camps for pilgrims.

As approximately 400 million attendees are expected over the festival's 45-day span, brands are eager to connect directly with consumers, particularly from rural areas, amidst challenges like rising prices and sluggish urban sales. Reliance Consumer Products Ltd (RCPL), part of Mukesh Ambani's retail empire, is focusing on enhancing pilgrims' experiences by providing essential refreshments and creating 'aaram sthal' (resting areas) for visitors. In a significant initiative, Reckitt, through its Dettol brand, is supporting around 15,000 sanitation workers and deploying health and hygiene volunteers across the event to promote wellness under the 'Dettol Banega Swasth India' campaign.

- Reckitt, through its Dettol brand, is supporting around 15,000 sanitation workers and deploying health and hygiene volunteers

Dabur is also engaging consumers through interactive activities designed to strengthen connections and encourage product trial. The company aims to align its messaging with Kumbh Mela's cultural significance, fostering trust and loyalty among attendees.

Coca-Cola is set to pair its beverage offerings with local cuisines, while ITC's brands Bingo and Mangaldeep will engage attendees through experiential initiatives that highlight regional culture.

PepsiCo has deployed a striking 30-foot illuminated Mountain Dew bottle and installed over 500 charging points for its Sting energy drink, ensuring pilgrims remain connected throughout the event. As projected by the Confederation of All India Traders the Mahakumbh Mela is expected to generate trade worth an impressive Rs 2 lakh crore, illustrating the event's potential as a major economic and cultural spectacle. —*PTI*

As projected by the Confederation of All India Traders the Mahakumbh Mela is expected to generate trade worth an impressive Rs 2 lakh crore **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: X

Koneru Humpy to compete in Norway Chess Women 2025

STAVANGER, 15 JAN

Reigning World Rapid chess champion and Indian Grandmaster Koneru Humpy will return to compete in the Norway Chess Women in May. Currently ranked world number six in women's classical chess, Humpy aims to make her mark in the prestigious chess tournament. Humpy's return to Norway Chess Women highlights her remarkable career, filled with significant milestones. In 2002, she became the first Indian woman to achieve the GM title, securing her place in chess history. Today, she remains India's top-ranked women's player in the country. Her achievements include winning the World Rapid Championship title twice in 2019 and 2024. "Humpy's achievements speak volumes, and we are delighted to welcome her back to Norway Chess Women 2025," said Kjell Madland, Founder and Tournament Director of Norway Chess. —*PTI*

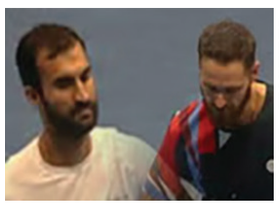


PHOTO: TWITTER

Yuki-Olivetti makes opening-round exit from AO

MELBOURNE, 15 JAN

India's Yuki Bhambri and his French partner Albano Olivetti bowed out of the Australian Open after a straight-sets loss to local wildcards Tristan Schoolkate and Adam Walton in the opening round here on Wednesday. The Indo-French duo, struggling with errors, fell 2-6, 6-7 in the men's doubles match that lasted one hour and 20 minutes. Bhambri and Olivetti failed to convert any of their three break points and committed five double faults, compared to just one by their Australian opponents. After surrendering the first set without much resistance, Bhambri and Olivetti showed more resilience in the second set, holding serve for most of the game.—*PTI*

East Bengal seeks govt intervention over ISL

KOLKATA, 15 JAN

Alleging "step-motherly treatment" by the Indian Super League organizers, the century-old East Bengal club has sought Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya's intervention, claiming that systemic bias, the outdated "refugees club" tag, and refereeing controversies have stalled their progress in the top-tier football competition.The incident occurred during the 'Kolkata Derby' in Guwahati on Saturday where East Bengal lost to arch-rivals Mohun Bagan by a solitary goal.—*PTI*

I will be back for LA Olympics: Nishant Dev

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Set to to pursue his childhood dream of competing in the professional circuit, Indian boxer Nishant Dev says the move does not mean the end of his quest for an Olympic medal and he will compete in the 2028 Los Angeles Games if the sport manages to stay on the roster.
Dev decided to turn professional owing to his close loss in the Paris Games quarterfinals and the state of flux surrounding boxing's Olympic future. However, competing in the Los Angeles Olympics continues to be at the back of his mind.The 2023 World Championship light middle-weight (71kg) bronze-medallist has signed up with Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing.
—*PTI*

India win by a 304-run victory over Ireland

Irish response never really got going and was bundled out for 131

RAJKOT, 15 JAN

Records tumbled like nine pins as the Indian women's cricket team, powered by skipper Smriti Mandhana's 70-ball century, demolished Ireland by a whopping 304 runs to claim its biggest-ever ODI win and complete a 3-0 clean sweep here on Wednesday.

The result of the match was a mere formality once India set Ireland a massive target of 436, and Ireland could only garner 131 before getting bundled out in 31.4 overs. India put the first step forward towards a crushing victory through record-breaking Mandhana (135, 80b, 12x4, 7x6) and her opening partner Pratika Rawal (154, 129b, 20x4, 1x6), reaching 435/5, the highest total by an Indian team — men's or women's — in ODIs.

India men's highest ODI total is 418/5 made against the West Indies in Indore in 2011.

Mandhana and Rawal added a whopping 233 runs for the first wicket in just 26.4 overs and there was no looking back.

Pratika top-scored with a mammoth 154 while stand-in skipper Mandhana scored India's fastest ODI century

PHOTO: PTI

Then spinners Tanuja Kanwar (2/31) and Deepti Sharma (3/27) took over, sharing five wickets among them to decimate the Irish line-up, which was well short on experience. Orla Prendergast (36) and Sarah Forbes (41) added 64 runs for a fluent third wicket stand that helped Ireland to recover from a shaky 24 for two to reach 88 without further damage. But once Prendergast was cleaned up by Kanwar, India was all over the tourists like a bad rash, claiming the remaining seven wickets for just 33 runs.

It also helped India eclipse their previous largest margin of victory (by runs) — 249 registered against the same opposition in 2017 at Potchefstroom, South Africa. Mandhana's 10th ODI century came off just 70 deliveries as the left-hander surpassed Harmanpreet Kaur's 87-ball hundred mark against South Africa last year. It also set the tone for India breaching the 400-run mark for the first time, joining Australia and New Zealand in that elite list. Mandhana was in her usual destructive self and was not afraid to take the aerial route over the 'V' and clear the 30-yard circle.

It was also the third instance of both Indian openers scoring hundreds in ODIs, following Reshma Gandhi and Mithali Raj's feat at Milton Keynes in 1999 and Deepti and Raut's partnership at Potchefstroom in 2017 all against Ireland.

The duo added 90 runs during the Power Play and 67 in the subsequent 10 overs, maintaining a brisk scoring rate. —*PTI*

INDIA'S BIGGEST WINS IN WODI CRICKET

OPPONENT	VENUE	MARGIN	YEAR
Ireland	Rajkot	304 runs	2025
Ireland	Potchefstrom	249 runs	2017
West Indies	Vadodra	211 runs	2024
Pakistan	Dambulla	207 runs	2008
Pakistan	Karachi	193 runs	2005

INDIA OPEN

Anupama, Tanisha-Ashwini enter second round

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

HS Prannoy and Priyanshu Rajawat went down fighting but former national champion Anupama Upadhyaya progressed to the second round in a mixed day for home shuttlers at the Indian Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

Priyanshu put up a valiant fight before succumbing 16-21, 22-20, 13-21 to world number 7 Kodai Naraoka of Japan in a physical battle that lasted an hour and 22 minutes. Meanwhile, Prannoy was defeated by Su Li Yang of Chinese Taipei 21-16, 18-21, 12-21 on the adjacent court.

PHOTO: PTI

In women's singles, Anupama defeated compatriot and academy mate Rakshitha Sree 21-17, 21-18 to reach the second round. The two Gopichand Academy trainees, who share a close bond off the court, exchanged friendly banter and mutual admiration after the match.

Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who clinched the Guwahati Masters title last month, eased past Kavya Gupta and Radhika Sharma 21-11, 21-12 to also advance to the second round.

The Panda sisters, Rutuparna and Swetaparna, also advanced to the second round with a remarkable come-from-behind win, overcoming Thailand's Phattharin Aiamvareesrisakul and Sarisa Janpeng 7-21, 21-19, 21-14.
—*PTI*

EAST BENGAL SCORE 1-0 WIN OVER SRIBHUMI FC

KOLKATA, 15 JAN

East Bengal took their second straight win of the season in the IWL 2024-25, beating citymates Sribhumi FC 1-0 at the East Bengal ground on Wednesday.

Soumya Guguloth scored the only goal of the match in the 76th minute.

This was newly-promoted Sribhumi's second straight defeat after losing to Sethu FC in Chennai.

East Bengal's formidable squad was underwhelmed in their opening encounter, and perhaps keen to make amends kicked things off in a flurry, creating and spurning a host of early chances. —*PTI*

India go down to Hong Kong 0-5 in women's futsal international debut

PHOTO: PTI

FUTSAL ASIAN CUP

India go down to Hong Kong 0-5 in women's debut

YOGYAKARTA, 7 DEC

The Indian women's futsal team's debut in the international arena did not go on expected lines with a 0-5 defeat to Hong Kong in a Group B qualifier for the AFC Women's Futsal Asian Cup 2025 at Yogyakarta's Among Rogo Sports Hall on Wednesday.

However, the team did display passion and perseverance in its first international outing, traits that are ingredients to take the game forward in India.Playing their first-ever match, the rookie Indian side dished out an encouraging brand of cohesive futsal in the 20 minutes of the first half to trail by a goal.

However, the going got difficult in the second session to sustain against a more experienced side that stands 31st in the FIFA rankings.While skilful Cheung Wai Ki, also a football international, played the key role in Hong Kong's victory with a classy hat-trick, Wai Yuen Ting and Kung Yuet Charis scored the other two goals.

It was a day of reckoning for the Indian girls as the players despite playing their first match at such a big stage, rarely lost their focus and remained true to what they were instructed to do.

Khushbu Saroj in the middle was a tireless trier and Drishti Pant caught attention because of her clever movement, moments after she appeared on the pitch.

India's goalkeeper Tanvi Vijaykumar was the busiest player on the court. She encountered a barrage of attacks from her rivals and frequently made some incredible saves. —*PTI*

Gauff, Osaka, Pegula, Sabalenka pave way to 3rd round

MELBOURNE, 15 JAN

American youngster Coco Gauff extended her winning streak to nine matches with a 6-3, 7-5 defeat of Jodie Burrage in the Australian Open second round on Wednesday.The American had to come from 5-3 down in the second set to reel in the World No.173.

Gauff's speed and consistency saw her ease to a 3-1 second-set lead over Burrage. However, the Briton threatened to turn the tables with a run of four straight games before Gauff responded with four straight of her own to get over the finishing line.

With a win, Aguff set up a third-round encounter with 2021 US Open finalist and No. 30 seed Leylah Fernandez, who defeated Cristina Bucsa 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 for a place in the third round.In other Day 4 action, two-time Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka secured a berth in the third round of a Grand Slam for the first time since giving birth in July 2023.

The world No. 51 Japanese rallied from a set down to earn a 1-6, 6-1, 6-3 win over 20th seed Karolina Muchova on Wednesday after battling for almost two hours. Osaka finished with 33 winners to 27 unforced errors, while Muchova hit 27 winners to 29 unforced errors.The four-time major winner's next opponent is Switzerland's Belinda Bencic, who is competing in her first Grand Slam since giving birth last year. Bencic advanced with a straight-sets dismissal of Dutchwoman Suzan Lamens, 6-1 7-6(3).In another match, seventh seed Jessica Pegula snapped her losing streak against 2018 semifinalist Elise Mertens with a 6-4 6-2 victory at Margaret Court Arena. Pegula, who reached three straight Australian Open quarterfinals between 2021 and 2023, needed 1 hour and 11 minutes to best Mertens, the highest-ranked unseeded player. —*PTI*

Vani takes a three-shot lead in second leg of WPGT

KOLKATA, 15 JAN

Vani Kapoor, returning to the domestic Women's Pro Golf Tour after a long hiatus, managed to bring in the day's best card of 2-under 68 and take the lead in the second Leg of the Hero WPG Tour at the Tollygunge Club on Wednesday.

Vani, whose last win at home came in the 12th Leg of the 2024 season at the DLF Golf and Country Club, began with a bogey on the first but picked birdies in fourth, 12th, and 16th to score 68.She was three ahead of the 2023 HPWGT Order of Merit leader Sneha Singh (71), while Ravjot K Dosanjh looking for her maiden win, was third with a round of 72.

Sneha Singh, who was T-5 in the first Leg last week, parred the first nine holes but had two birdies against three bogeys on the back nine for 71.Ravjot had two birdies against two bogeys on the front nine and turned in even par. —*PTI*

Liverpool frustrated by Forest, City lead at Brentford

LONDON, 15 JAN

Liverpool's charge toward the Premier League title was halted by stubborn Nottingham Forest in a 1-1 draw between the top two on Tuesday as Manchester City's resurgence came undone in a 2-2 draw at Brentford. Chris Wood fired Forest in front early on at a raucous City Ground, but Liverpool dominated almost the entire 97 minutes and got back on level terms thanks to substitute Diogo Jota's goal with his first touch. Only a brilliant goalkeeping performance from Matz Sels denied the leaders victory, but the point maintained a six-point cushion over Forest for Arne Slot's men, who also have a game in hand.

Nottingham Forest goalkeeper Matz Sels frustrated Liverpool in a 1-1 draw

PHOTO: X

Forest had won their last seven games in all competitions to raise the possibility of matching Leicester's incredible title win of 2015/16. Liverpool's second consecutive league draw opens the door for Arsenal to cut the gap at the top to four points when they host Tottenham in the north London derby on Wednesday.

Any suggestion City could get themselves back in the title race was ended in a late collapse in west London as Brentford struck twice in the final 10 minutes for a deserved point. Phil Foden's double had City on course for a fourth consecutive win after just one victory in 13 games. —*PTI*

AUSTRALIAN OPEN 2025

Djokovic breaks Federer's record

MELBOURNE, 15 JAN

The 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic has moved past Swiss legend Roger Federer to claim the record for most major singles matches played among men and women by contesting in his 430th Grand Slam singles match.

The 10-time Australian Open winner battled past 21-year-old qualifier Jaime Faria 6-1, 6-7(4), 6-3, 6-2 on Wednesday moving past Federer's tally of 429.

The Serb is through to the third round of the season's first major for the 17th time in 20 appearances to continue his quest for a 25th major singles title and 100th tour-level crown.

Melbourne, Jan 15 (IANS): The 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic has moved past Swiss legend Roger Federer to claim the record for most major singles matches played among men and women by contesting in his 430th Grand Slam singles match.

The 10-time Australian Open winner battled past 21-year-old qualifier Jaime Faria 6-1, 6-7(4), 6-3, 6-2 on Wednesday moving past Federer's tally of 429. The Serb is through to the third round of the season's first major for the 17th time in 20 appearances to continue his quest for a 25th major singles title and 100th tour-level crown. "I think I responded very well in the third and particularly fourth set, the way I ended the match. He was playing lights-out tennis towards the end of the second set and the beginning of the third. I had to weather the storm. He's been practically serving two first serves the entire match."It's not easy to play someone like that who doesn't have anything to lose coming out. He's a big guy, very young, so I told him at the net, the future is bright for him, he should keep going," Djokovic was quoted saying by the ATP website.Next up for Djokovic will be a third-round meeting with 26th-seeded Czech Tomas Machac, a 3-6, 7-6(1), 6-7(5), 7-6(4), 6-4 winner against Reilly Opelka earlier on Wednesday. The pair split two previous Lexus ATP Head-to-Head meetings in 2023 and 2024, with Machac winning their most recent showdown in last year's Geneva semi-finals. —*PTI*

Arsenal's Jesus to undergo surgery after ACL injury

NEW DELHI, 15 JAN

Arsenal forward Gabriel Jesus will have an operation on his left knee after sustaining an anterior cruciate ligament injury. Jesus, 27, was taken off on a stretcher during Sunday's FA Cup third-round defeat by Manchester United at Emirates Stadium.

The Brazilian has made 27 appearances across all competitions this season, scoring seven goals.

"Gabriel Jesus has received extensive assessments, scans, and specialist reviews which have confirmed an injury to the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee," Arsenal said in a statement.

"Gabby will undergo surgery in the coming days and will soon begin his recovery and rehabilitation program."

Jesus, who joined Arsenal from Manchester City for £45m in July 2022, scored six goals in his past seven appearances.

He is the latest player to join a lengthening injury list at Arsenal with England forward Bukayo Saka. —*PTI*